

Reborn ^{as a} **Vending Machine** Now Wander the

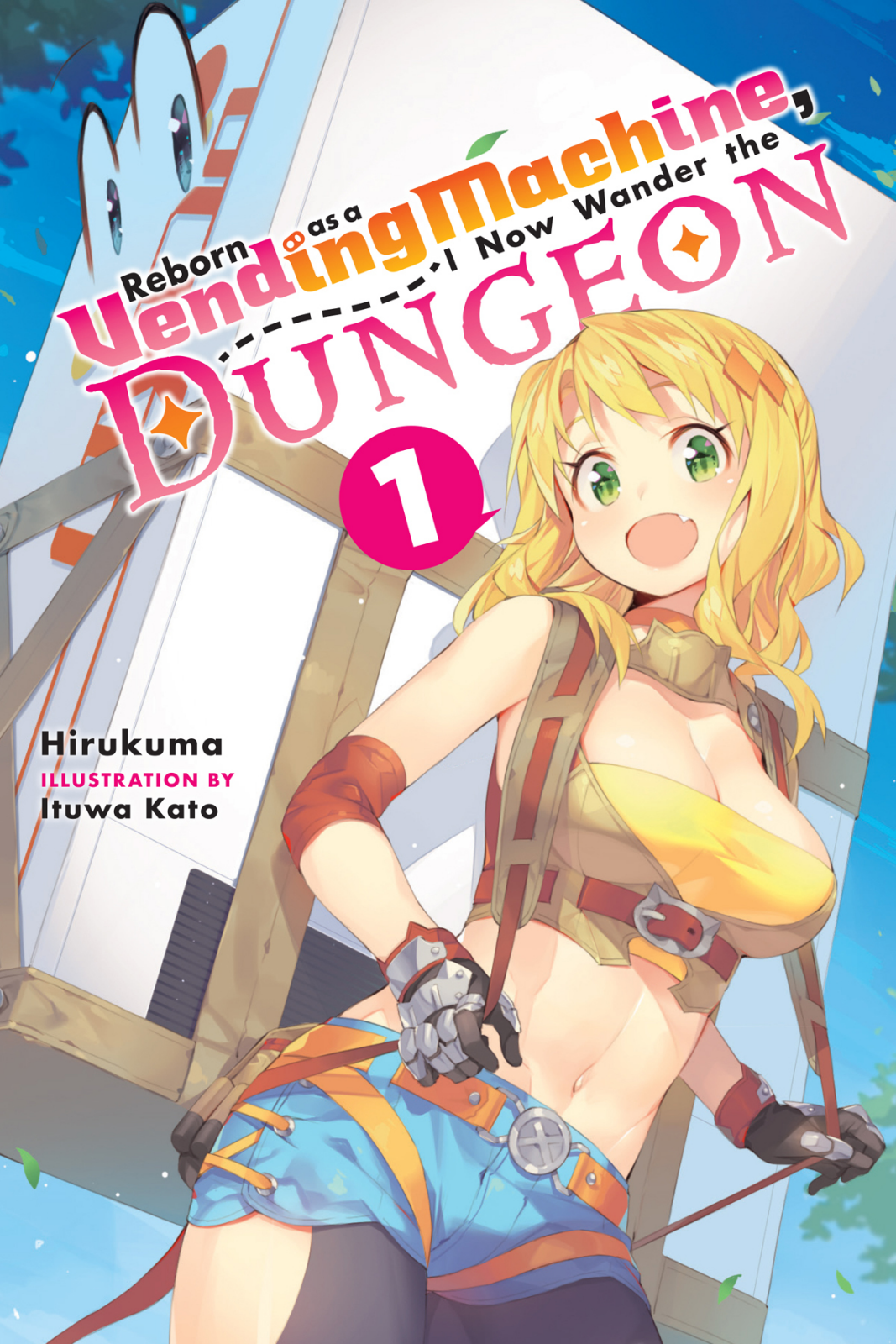
DUNGEON

1

Hirukuma

ILLUSTRATION BY

Ituwa Kato





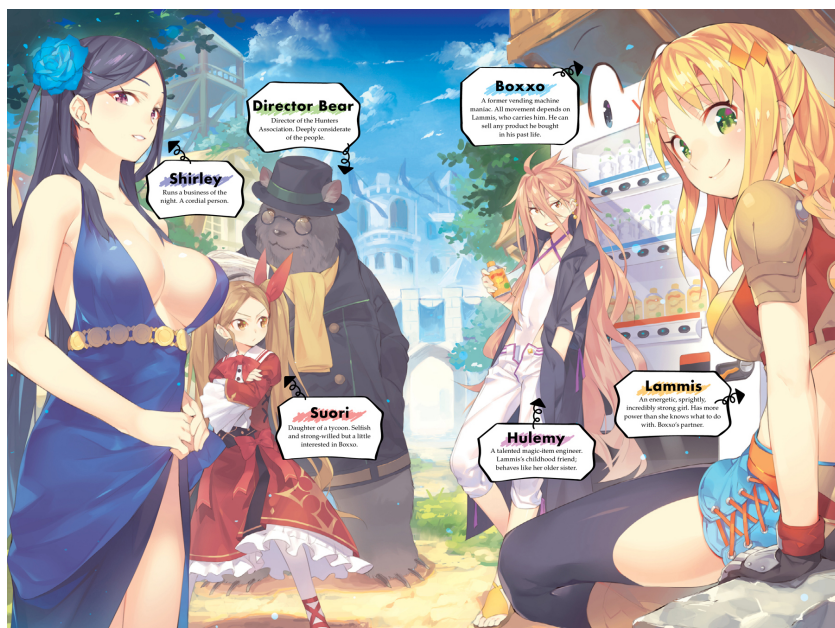


Reborn as a
Vending Machine,
Now Wander the
DUNGEON



STORY BY
Hirukuma

ILLUSTRATION BY
Ituwa Kato





I hear the girls talking, so without particularly thinking about it—just casually, no ulterior motives whatsoever—I look over to them.

Shirley

"Hee-hee.
Thank you."

"Woowww! Shirley,
you're so pretty...
I'm jealous!"

Lammis



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Reborn ^{as a} Vending Machine,
I Now Wander the
DUNGEON



Hirukuma
ILLUSTRATION BY
Ituwa Kato


NEW YORK

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Reborn as a Vending Machine, I Now Wander the Dungeon, Volume 1

Hirukuma

Translation by Andrew Prowse

Cover art by Ituwa Kato

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JIDOU HANBAIKI NI UMAREKAWATTA ORE HA MEIKYUU WO SAMAYOU, Vol. 1

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Prologue

My face grows pale with fear as a couple of menacing brutes threaten to drag me down a back alley. In the next breath, something appears before me, kicking up a wind in its wake.

“Gugahhhh!!”

One ruffian’s scream is accompanied by a crashing noise, but it’s hard to focus on him right now.

“What the hell are you doing?!”

“Scary old men trying to drag a weak little girl into the dark is considered a crime, you know.”

Despite the two imposing thugs’ attempts at intimidation, a petite-framed girl stands between us, calmly confronting them. She boasts leather armor, shorts, and blond hair tied into a side ponytail.

I think to myself that she’s probably in her midteens. She appears to be a hunter judging by her leather armor, but facing off against such frightening men is more than reckless. And besides—

“Oh, so now some freak show is running her mouth at us? You just laid hands on my buddy, so I hope you’re ready for the consequences.”

They’re right—she’s unusual. Weird even. There’s nothing wrong with her clothes, mind you, but for some reason, she’s carrying a giant metal box on her back.

She’s in front of me, shielding me from them, so I have a full view of her back, with the metal box right before my eyes.

What is it? It’s mostly white, but the upper half has been fitted with glass, behind which lies all manner of things I’ve never seen before... Wait, seriously, what is this thing? I’ve seen rare magic items from past and present, from around the world, all thanks to my father’s job—but this is a first for me.

One of the oddities is a see-through bottle with a painting of a

mountain on it, and another looks like a small cylinder with a picture of yellow soup drawn on it. Others have fruits, but— Oh! Are these really paintings? They look just like the real things. The artist who painted these must be incredibly skilled.

The more I look at this box, the less I understand it, but suddenly, I can't see it at all. The girl carrying it moves abruptly, vanishing from sight.

As though the metal trunk isn't even a consideration for this charming girl, she zips right up to one of my assailants and throws a punch.

It looked like she only tapped him on the shoulder, but he flies into the sky, spinning like a drill!

Wait, she didn't hit him that hard, did she? Besides, that wisp of a girl couldn't possibly knock such a brawny man off his feet.

As I put the thought from my mind, unable to process what I just witnessed, I hear someone unfamiliar.

"Get one free with a winner."

Wait, whose voice was that? And what did it mean, *Get one free with a winner*?

"Oh, behind me!"

One of the ruffians' friends had snuck up behind the girl, but she spins around and roundhouse kicks him.

"Thanks, Boxxo."

"Welcome."

Who's Boxxo?! And who just said *Welcome*—and why?!

I feel like it was coming from the metal box, but that can't be. Anyone in there while it was jerking around like that would be in a sorry state.

I approach the girl who so easily thrashed the thugs, put a hand to my hat—pulled down over my eyes so it doesn't slip—and bow. "Thank you very much."

"Are you okay? Did you get hurt?"

"Yes, I'm fit as a fiddle. Might I, um, ask your name?"

She looks strange, but I can't let this chance to make the acquaintance of such a skilled lady slide. She must be a hunter of considerable renown.

"Oh, um. My name's Lammis."

"Lady Lammis? I will make sure to remem—"

"And this is Boxxo."

Hmm? Who? I'm fairly certain the only ones here are myself,

Lady Lammis, and the hooligans at our feet, right? No one else is around.

“I, um, beg your pardon, but I don’t see a Boxxo anywhere.”

“Oops, sorry! I guess that didn’t make sense. Here we go!”

She sets the metal box down next to her and promptly extends her hand.

“This magic item is Boxxo.”

“Welcome.”

“What?”

Wait, what’s she talking about? H-hang on. Just calm down. Plenty of hunters give names to their favorite battle gear. She must be one of them... I definitely heard a voice, though.

“I, ah, so this is Sir Boxxo. I do believe he spoke just now.”

“Yup, he did! Boxxo’s a talking magic item. But he can only say certain things.”

“I—I see. That is amazing!”

If that’s true, this prize would fetch an absurd price on the market. My encounter with those thugs put a significant damper on my sneaky afternoon stroll, but this discovery could more than make up for it.

“It is! But that’s not all. Boxxo can give you delicious food and drinks, too!”

“Um...”

“Oh, I bet you don’t believe me. Here, let me prove it. I’ll go first. See the numbers below each item? Those are prices. Now I’ll put a silver coin in here.”

They do look a lot like prices, but a whole silver coin to purchase one of them is rather exorbitant. But wait. How can a metal container like this sell things?



“And then you push the bumpy thing under the one you want to buy. And then...”

Hearing the clatter of something falling, Lammis squats, then reaches into the lower part of her odd luggage and fishes around for something.

“That’s how you get the item.”

Wow! The exact same thing displayed behind the glass is now in Lady Lammis’s hand. Wait, is this for real? This magical contraption would be worth a fortune.

“Can I—? Ah, would you mind at all if I bought something as well?”

“Yup, sure. Go ahead!”

Lammis steps away from the metal box. When I move toward it in her place, it says, “Welcome.”

“Let’s see— I’ll put the money in. Which should I choose? Hmm. I will pick this one with the fruit painting on it.”

I’ve decided on an item emblazoned with a brilliant citrus fruit. Then I hear a sound from the long, thin hole near the bottom of the box, so I nervously reach for it.

“Eek! It’s cold!”

“Yup, all the cold ones are really cold, and all the warm ones are nice and hot.”

It can even cool drinks for you? What in the world is this thing? This canteen I bought is hard, but if I give it a real push, the material warps. Maybe the metal is stretched really thin.

This part on top must be where you drink. It’s long like a bottle, after all. And if it’s anything like a bottle, I just have to twist this part on the end.

With a click, the lid opens, and a refreshing scent tickles my nostrils.

“Oh, it smells good!”

Aware of the possibility that I was about to imbibe a suspicious brew, I sample only a bit with my tongue.

“Ahhh, i-it’s delicious!”

Both the natural acidity of the citrus and the perfect amount of sweetness spread across my taste buds. And the coolness feels refreshing. I gulp down more of it, feeling the chill wash through my body. Then, without thinking, I exhale noisily.

“I guess you liked it.”

Oh, I drank it all. This magic item stores things that taste great, and it can even speak. Plus, it probably has a trove of coins inside from the people who purchased items. This is a gold mine. I would very much like to have it.

“Yes, I’m truly astounded. Oh—but look at me, I haven’t yet thanked you for helping me. My house is right up this road, so would you like to stop by for a short while?”

“You don’t need to worry about it.”

“No, I insist. If I don’t thank you, my parents will be quite cross with me. Please?”

And so I try my best to keep her from leaving. She refuses, though, saying she is in the middle of work.

“Mistress, Mistress! Where have you gone?”

It would seem as though my time is up. Lady Lammi the hunter and her magic item, Boxxo. I will remember those names.

A Maniac's Death

I love vending machines. How much, you ask?

Even when the only money left in my pocket is a thousand yen, and I need to keep eating for another week, if I see an unfamiliar item in a vending machine, I will buy it without a second thought.

But then, wouldn't that mean I like what's inside vending machines rather than vending machines themselves?

No, no—it's both. I like both. I adore the designs of vending machines, boxes packed full of a myriad of attractive products for sale. They're like treasure chests to me.

Beverages I've never tried before—carbonated drinks with ingredients that come together to create a land mine of flavor. Hot beverages that simply must be enjoyed while they're piping hot. I just know that if I don't buy them, they'll be gone in a month. So I have no choice, right?

Not only beverages, either. Vending machines have snacks, sweets, and bread, and some will even heat up frozen food for you.

It goes beyond edible things, too. Vending machines can be filled to the brim with stationery, clothing, socks, and even adult items. Anyone who says they're not interested is a liar.

Vending machines, from past and present, from all around the world—I love them so much that I've gone on trips to see rare ones that I find on the Internet. Those are the best trips. My computer is filled with the cherished files from my travels, including all the spectacular pictures I've taken.

In a way, it was probably inevitable that I died from being crushed under a vending machine.

There was one specimen, you see, loaded on a light truck meant for placing vending machines down. The truck crashed into a car that came speeding around a turn, and the vending machine flew

right at me.

Now that I think about it, if I had tried my best to dodge it, I probably would have lived. But the vending machine entranced me with its brand-new design, its exquisite form. I had to save that vending machine. And so I tried to catch it before it hit the ground.

Even without anything inside it, a vending machine weighs around 880 pounds—fully stocked, it's said they can exceed 1,700 pounds. Could a human being possibly catch such a heavy piece of metal flying at them?

As for the answer—well, seeing as how it crushed me and I died, you probably know it already.

And so a vending machine maniac died—just as he should have, in a way.



Normally, that's where the tale would have ended. But my story has a sequel.

After falling into an endless sleep, embracing the cold touch of metal, I abruptly wake up.

While I'm relieved I'm not dead, I'm also worried whether the vending machine I caught was safe. That turns out to be a groundless fear.

Why, you ask? That will become painfully clear in a little bit.

For some reason, I'm standing near a lake I've never seen before. I'm not moving, I'm not talking, I can't feel anything. I'm just *here*.

I want to shout, proclaim my confusion, but what comes out of my mouth is...

"Welcome."

That was unexpected. Unable to help doubting my sanity, I imagine for a moment that somebody else had spoken, but it felt like it was me.

I calm myself down and try speaking again.

"Thank you."

Both the tone of voice and the manner of speech are crisp and easy to understand. It's my voice, but it doesn't seem right. For starters, that wasn't what I was trying to say. But when I tried to talk, those were the words that naturally came out.

I focus my mind, determined to get it this time for sure, and

Speak.

“Please come again.”

And then:

“Get one free with a winner.”

Furthermore:

“Too bad.”

Finally:

“You’re a winner.”

I’ve heard these phrases before. Many times. There’s no doubt. It’s the voice I hear when I buy something at my favorite manufacturer’s vending machine.

No, it can’t be. That’s utterly preposterous. Sure, maybe I love vending machines more than anything, but there’s no way I’d ever die and be reborn as one, is there...?

I mean, I can see this vast scenery in front of me.

Small, scattered clouds floating along in the sky, a giant lake before me. I seem to be on a lakeside. And after all, if I look down, I can see my reflection in the lake.

A body completely white, perfectly straight, and rectangular, the ideal blend of elegance and functional beauty. Behind the immaculately polished glass, plastic bottles of mineral water and small cans of corn soup are lined up in order. The golden ratio and nothing less—the arrangement exudes a calculated style. A double-layered gentleness, one that goes beyond “hot” and “cold” to grant “cool” and “warm.”

On top of that, the prices have been set magnanimously—the cans 100 yen, the bottles 130. No matter where I look, it’s spectacular... But this is a vending machine!

Whaaaaaat?! You’ve got to be kidding me! This is impossible! I can’t have been reborn as a vending machine. That would be the worst...or would it? Maybe God had actually been merciful to me, allowing me to be reborn as something I love.

B-but still, I mean, car enthusiasts don’t want to become cars. Oh, but back in kindergarten, I remember a friend saying he wanted to be a police car when he grew up. I wonder if his dream came true.

I’ll just have to accept that I’m a vending machine now and there’s nothing I can do about it. And if I’m being honest, it doesn’t even feel bad—that’s the sad thing about maniacs.

Anyway, crying and wailing won’t get me anywhere. I don’t like

this, but I have to accept it. I exhale, trying to vent all the murk and haze pent up in my chest.

“You’re a winner.”

Shut up, me.

It seems like whenever I try to talk, a canned line comes out. After experimenting for a while, I’ve learned all of my available phrases.

“Welcome.” “Thank you.” “Please come again.” “Get one free with a winner.” “Too bad.” “You’re a winner.” “Insert coins.”

Looks like that’s it. Better than not being able to talk at all, I guess, but I can’t have a conversation with anyone like this. If I stumbled across a vending machine endlessly repeating those lines over and over, I know I’d run away.

If I have to give up on conversations, then what can I actually do? Something possible for a vending machine... Sell products? There’s nobody around to buy them, so I can’t do that at the moment.

Come to think of it, there isn’t a soul in sight. Are my sales going to be all right?

Even if this is some remote location, somebody’s gotta come by eventually. No one would ever put a vending machine in a place where it won’t have good sales.

This place seems like a tourist spot. Maybe there’s a summerhouse on the lake. Even if nobody comes, someone from the manufacturer would probably be around to do an inspection or swap out my items.

I decide to search for something I can do, so that when someone does come and I have a chance to talk to them, I can make the most of it.

Firstly, it would be ideal if I could move, but I’ve been trying to for a while now, and my body won’t budge. Of course, if a vending machine sprouted arms and legs and started walking around wherever it wanted, that would be terrifying.

Isn’t there anything else I can do? The prerecorded vending machine voice samples play when I want them to. That must mean I can, to some degree, control this vending machine’s functions.

If vending machines do anything, it’s accepting money and dispensing items. That’s all, isn’t it? Maybe I can dispense the items without taking any money...? I don’t have anything else to do, so it’s time to test things out.

First, I'll start by understanding everything about my body. I, er, suppose I'll have to accept that I'm not a human but a vending machine. My muscles, bones, and organs are mechanical parts, electrodes, and items. My voice is contained within a handful of recorded lines. I don't have arms or legs.

That's, well...the feeling I get, at least.

Times like these call for accepting reality and making calm decisions. And occasionally, kicking it into high gear and moving boldly.

Yes, just like those beverages, separated into cool and warm... Even I don't understand what that analogy is supposed to mean, but that's how I'm going to approach this.

I'm a vending machine. People move their bodies with their minds. What kind of vending machine would I be if I couldn't control my faculties with mine?

Believe in the vending machine. Become the vending machine. I am a vending machine. I will understand my body!

[Vending Machine]

~~PT 1,000~~ Water

~~PT 1,000~~ Soup

PT 1,000

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention

Huh? Something just flashed through my thoughts... Wait, I don't have a brain, do I? Anyway, a bunch of words showed up in my mind.

Hmm. They must be the kinds of beverages in me. It's a lonely lineup, but I suppose it's better than having a mess of shady drinks. And no matter what anyone says, plain old mineral water is awesome.

Besides, canned corn potage is delicious in winter. Actually, is there a way to figure out who the manufacturers are?

More words flash into my mind.

Hmm. This is a list of mineral water manufacturers. Some are brands everyone knows by name, and others are smaller, lesser-known companies. I know every single one, of course, and I've sampled all of them.

The mineral water installed now is from what is probably the

biggest company of them all. Could I change it?

[You must spend points to change item types.]

Huh? Now some words have appeared. What are points? Is that what's listed below the CORN SOUP line?

Then how do I use them? Hmm. Can I control this mental display somehow? Will it accept a vague sense of...I don't know, *something*?

[You can spend 10 points to change an item's manufacturer.]

Hey, it did. I imagined using a mouse in my brain, bringing the cursor over to the *PT* word in the list, and left-clicking on it. Then a reply popped up. What'll happen if I right-click on it?

[Points are converted from currency. By spending points, you can restock, change items, and add functions. One point is consumed per hour instead of electricity.]

Oh, an explanation appeared. That's useful. It's time to investigate this body thoroughly and completely.

Vending Machine Body

As a result of my information gathering, I've learned the following things.

PT stands for *points*, which I can spend to restock or swap what items I have for sale, or even alter my vending machine body's functions.

These additional features don't only warm or cool beverages—some let me heat up frozen food or pour hot water into cup ramen. There was a lot of information, but I made sure to skim through the text at least.

To more thoroughly investigate these additional features, I looked into the kinds of items I can dispense. When I checked, a ridiculously long list came up. After poring over everything, it seemed like anything I bought at a vending machine before dying is now something I could acquire with points.

Just to test, I tried converting points to cold milk tea; by using ten points, I got (C) Milk Tea (x100). I exchanged it with the rightmost bottle of mineral water, since they had been occupying the entire cold-beverage area. I can set the prices, too, so I set it at one hundred yen.

For reference, one hundred yen can be converted into one point. Does my system restock itself using its own sales? I sort of feel like that doesn't match generic vending machines.

Oh, right. One other strange thing I discovered when I learned how to check my body: I don't run on electricity. It's already been explained, but it seems I use points in place of power. I consume one point per hour, which means I go through twenty-four in a day. In other words, I guess my minimum expenses are 2,400 yen per day.

I still have more than nine hundred points, so I can keep operating like this for another month. Still, I'll refrain from

unnecessary spending. No adventures for me until I get some steady sales.

Anyway, there's a good reason why I'm thinking about all this. I'm bored. Two days have passed since I became a vending machine, but not a single person's come by. When I examined my surroundings more closely, it was obvious—the area by the lakeside doesn't have a paved road anywhere. Nobody is going to come here.

I can't believe this... I really hope my life doesn't end without anyone showing up, followed by me shutting down.

Hmm, well...let's give my additional features a look, too. Maybe one of them will let me grow tires so I can move on my own. No matter how I look at it, this location is awful. I want to go somewhere more populated.

Mm-hmm, features, features. Microwave—with hot water, I can provide hot food. Other than that— Oh, I can get the function where I pour drinks into paper cups, too? And...hmm? Underneath the functions is something a little odd. What's this?

"Gugeggogeggo."

Oh, is that a creature's voice? Thinking can come later. I've been on one-player mode for too long. Just the thought of encountering a living thing makes my heart skip a beat.

I've never heard a cry like that, but it's vaguely frog-like. Sounds like it came from the forest near the lake. I'm pretty sure I don't have actual eyes, but I mentally keep them peeled anyway.

Something just came out of the trees—what? Uh, do frogs these days tend to have blackish skin and wear leather armor? It has a misshapen wooden club in its hands, and it's walking on two legs to boot.

That's a little much to refer to as a new type of frog, isn't it? The creature's face is as big as a person's, and warts cover its exposed arms and legs. Its eyes are pointed up at the sides, and I can see sharp canines in its mouth, even though it's a frog.

Wait, that looks awfully like a monster. A bipedal, wart-covered frog? I think it's less than five feet tall, but it also seems vicious.

If that's special makeup, it's good enough to shock even Hollywood. But its slimy-looking, gleaming skin and the twitchy movements of those eyes feel genuine.

Does that mean this isn't Japan? Normally, this would be when shock takes hold of me, but I've already turned into a vending

machine. Clearly, I can laugh common sense right out the door.

Wait, if this is another world or something, then how does currency work? I'm fairly confident no one will use yen in some alternate universe. Doesn't that mean I'm doomed if I can't get my metaphorical hands on some Japanese money?!

"Gyulgego?"

Oh, the frog person is looking this way. Hey, you, stay away! Wait. If that thing's wearing leather armor, chances are it's an intelligent life-form. I'm the worst, judging someone solely based on appearance. This might be my first customer.

"Welcome." I don't think it will understand me, but I greet it anyway.

"Gwagego?!"

It's looking around in surprise. Sorry, but that voice came from the vending machine.

Now it's crouching with its club raised. If I talk again, I'll probably get a funny reaction out of it, but...let's not.

A little while passes as the frog person guardedly surveys the area, but eventually it gives up, unable to figure out what made the sound. Then it turns to me again.

Up close, the monster is pretty impressive. I've never been comfortable with reptiles or amphibians to begin with, but this one is the size of a full-grown adult, which makes it twice as horrifying.

It's walking around now, keeping a fixed distance from me and my boxy body. Does it not understand what a vending machine is?

After a full circuit, the frog person raises its arms, and... Hey, stop! What are you doing with that club?!

Helpless to stop it, I can only watch as it swings downward.

The bludgeon strikes the glass display, rattling the whole vending machine.

[3 damage. Durability decreased by 3.]

Now what? Why did *damage* and *durability* pop up? This isn't a game. Ah, crap. Only the lowest of beasts would ever harm a vending machine. Doesn't it understand my functional yet artistic beauty?!

[2 damage. Durability decreased by 2.]

Crap! Don't get full of yourself, frog. You hit me again when I couldn't retaliate! It doesn't seem like I can feel pain, so I suppose that's fine, but won't I break down at this rate?!

Wait, what's this "durability" thing? Maybe it corresponds to

this vending machine's sturdiness, or life force.

[Durability: When this runs out, the vending machine will break and become unusable.]

Oh, so it's like hit points, then. How much do I have left? Wait, how do I even check my stats...?

[Vending Machine]

DUR 95/100

TGH 10

STR 0

SPD 0

DEX 0

MAG 0

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention

Whoa, something else came up. These must be my stats. Everything but durability and toughness is zero, huh? Well, I suppose I don't need the other stats, seeing as how I'm a vending machine. If there's a MAG stat, maybe that means magic exists in this world... Man, it would have been so cool to be a spell-slinging vending machine, but all I have in that column is a whole lot of nothing.

Wait, now's not the time to wallow in self-pity. Wh-what should I do? I'll break down if the frog person keeps hitting me like this. I- isn't there some way to drive it off or replenish my durability?!

[Durability can be restored by spending points.]

Oh...I see. In that case, I still have nine hundred points, so maybe if this turns into a war of attrition, the frog person will give up.

Then, as if to scorn my very thoughts, there appeared three new frog people from the forest. They reacted too fast to that event flag!

Th-this is bad. Really bad. One of those frog people has an ax. Nothing good is going to happen if it hits me with that thing.

[2 damage. Durability decreased by 2.]

All right, all right, I get it! Wh-what now? Isn't there anything in the list of additional functions that can help me?!

Hot-water dispenser, purchase jingle, compartment shock absorbers, slot machine... These are useless! I need something revolutionary—a function that'll get me out of this mess!

And then my eyes are drawn to a new option that appeared—though I don't have eyes.

[Transform Points: 1,000,000,000]

Wait, I can transform like a robot? Every man's fantasies are packed into that one word! But seriously, a *billion* points? You don't actually want to let me have that, do you?

N-no good. Can a guy get something a little more realistic to buy that'll get him out of this?!

Even as I scan the list, I keep seeing the report [2 damage. Durability decreased by 2.] come up again and again. Hurry, hurry, gotta find a more effective... Oh, right, underneath.

After seeing it earlier, I left it alone, thinking I'd check it out later. I read the line again.

[Blessings]

What's a blessing? No, stop. I can ponder that later. Let's investigate.

[Blessing: A special power granted by the gods. You may choose one without spending any points.]

Oh, I get the first one for free? I don't really get it, but it's gotta be some superpowered magic or something, right?! O-okay, let's choose one!

[Physical Alteration, Vision Transfer, Telepathy, Absorption, Plundering, Swordsmanship, Martial Arts, Fire Magic, Water Magic...]

What do you expect me to do with martial arts or swordsmanship?! I don't have any limbs! But I'll grab them once I get Transform, just you wait!

Wait, now's not the time for that! Haven't I learned by now?!

If I don't have any MAG, I can't use magic, either, can I? Um, maybe communicating with the frog people using telepathy is worth a try—I could probably get them to understand me regardless of language—but they didn't look too interested in negotiating right now.

S-something else, then. Shouldn't there be a Blessing that's useful even for a vending machine?!

As I reach the very bottom of the list, there's one entry I can't peel my eyes from. It says Force Field, and its effect reads: [Erects an impassable force field around you at a distance of 3 feet. You can permit specific targets to pass in and out.] Th-this is it!

[2, 3, 5 damage. Durability decreased by 10.]

I don't have any time left. I-I'm going with this!

After choosing Force Field, I feel like something warm slides into me. I—I don't really get it, but Force Field, activate!

"Gurgegorgogego?!"

Oh, the frog people got blown away. And they fell onto their backs, too. How dare you beat me up as much as you wanted. I have to get a word in. I won't be satisfied otherwise.

"Please come again."

Heh. I don't think they understand me, but it feels good to get that off my chest. Then, as though the frog people totally know I insulted them, they come straight at me with their weapons in hand, but the bright-blue light around me blocks them, preventing their approach.

"Get one free with a winner."

I provoke them again. Oh, wow. They're frantically charging. This Force Field does its job really well. The semitransparent blue walls surround me at right angles, but despite the frog people attempting to bash it in with their weapons, the barrier throws them back.

Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha, I've created the ultimate indestructible vending machine!

[Points decreased by 1. Points decreased by 1. Points decreased by 1...]

W-wait a second! My points are draining like bathwater here! I need to spend points to maintain this Force Field?!

Hey, hold on, guys. I, uh, I hope you nice frog people decide to return to your homes real soon.

"Please come again."

Crap, now their attacks have gotten wilder. But I didn't even mean to provoke them. Whoa, my points are seriously dropping fast. I think it would be best if you all kindly gave up now, please!

A Buyer

The frog people continued to beat on the Force Field for a while after that, but once they realized they weren't getting anywhere, the crowd reluctantly dispersed and went away.

I think I'm safe, but...let's make sure.

[Vending Machine]

DUR 65/100

TGH 10

STR 0

SPD 0

DEX 0

MAG 0

PT 346

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention

{Blessings} Force Field

I lost a huge amount of points. The Force Field saved me, of course, but it cost way too much. If more monsters attack, I'm not sure I can drive them off.

Things just took a real turn for the worse. My durability is down and my vending machine body is in a sorry state. Points are precious, but I can't do nothing and break down, either. Time to repair.

I use 35 points to fully recover, leaving me with 311. I consume 24 each day, so if I don't do anything, I'll hold out for over ten days—but if a customer still doesn't appear by then, my time will run out and I'll shut down. I wonder if I die if that happens... That would be a terribly tragic end to my new life—too cruel for a vending machine.

First off, I'd like to meet an intelligent human or a monster, but all I can do is wait. I can't use any more points than this. I just have to wait...for someone to show up.



Three days have passed. Nobody has come, though several times I saw the frog people watching me from afar.

Instead of physically trembling at the fact that I was nearing death's door with every passing second, my vending machine body made a high-pitched squeal. It's how my body relieves tension, I'm sure.

Sigh. I just want to sell something, to be a vending machine one time before I die. I've gone through this whole reincarnation business, and I want to play the part once.

"C-can't go on... I'm so hungry, I can't move... Aaaaah, why does this always happen to me...?"

That... That's a person's voice! God hasn't forsaken me after all!

It sounds like a depressed girl, and probably someone young. Where is she? Where did that voice come from?!

I've been doubting whether my words make any sense to others here, but if I understand hers, she should know what I'm saying if I call it out. I have all kinds of sarcastic thoughts regarding why Japanese works here even though this is a different world, but that doesn't matter right now.

My life is riding on this.

"Everyone I team up with abandons me... I guess the Blessing of Might doesn't mean much when I'm so clumsy..."

The voice is a bit clearer now, so she has to be coming this way. The girl sounds miserable, like she's completely out of options. Did her comrades abandon her? With all the frog people swarming around here, wouldn't that be dangerous?

"I dropped the bag with all my food when I was running away, too... My stomach feels like it's eating itself... Ugh, this is the worst... Ma, Pa, I ain't gonna make it!"

Then she starts crying. The last part she muttered seemed like she spoke it in a Kansai accent. It sounded exactly like someone who had left their home in the countryside only to have their dreams shattered.

But why did she come here in the first place? There are

monsters all over. Is she traveling, or is there a town or village somewhere nearby?

“I never should’ve become a hunter. I’m sorry, Ma, Pa!”

Hunter? Does she go out stalking animals? If this were a certain game, it would mean a familiar monster-hunting profession. Then again, I *have* seen frog people wandering around in this world. I can’t discard the possibility.

“Nothing to eat, either. What do I do? Maybe I can kill the frog fiends and eat them... No, I won’t be able to land any by myself, and I’m too hungry to move!”

She said she has the Blessing of Might, so maybe she’s confident in her strength but can’t handle her weapon very well. Her dexterity must be low.

Without any bags on her, it seems unlikely that she’s carrying any money. H-hmm. I still don’t understand, but my anticipation has mostly deflated.

“Wait, what’s that thing? A monument? But it looks metal.”

Oh, she noticed me. Judging by her voice, she’s pretty close by, but I can’t tell what she looks like from behind. Come around in front.

A girl appears from behind me, though I don’t know whether my mental request had anything to do with it.

“Wh-what is this? Its edges are super straight. Are those... drinks behind the glass?”

The short girl cocks her head in wonder. Her blond hair is tied up to the side—is this hairstyle called a side ponytail?

She’s just over five feet tall, with big eyes and sharp features. Her style is more cute than pretty. She has a certain charm that would probably make her insanely popular if she became an idol or something.

Her nervousness and teary eyes stirred my protective instincts. What the hell? Am I a pervert? A-anyway, putting that aside, her clothes are grabbing my attention, too.

Her shoes look like mountain-climbing boots, and she has on black tights and blue shorts. These don’t seem too odd, but the rest of her outfit is stranger.

Her top resembles those bulletproof vests that police officers wear at dangerous scenes... Actually, it must be leather armor. She has shoulder pads and is equipped with sturdy-looking gloves, too.

This is an outfit straight out of a fantasy book. After giving her

a once-over, I spot a small bag fastened to her belt. The kind that valuables or money are often stored in.

"There's water here, but how do I get it out? Those look like letters written on it, but I can't read them."

She can understand spoken words but not written letters? That's a problem that'll need solving before we even reach the buying part. I'll have to guide her somehow.

"Could I get them if I break the glass? But it seems like such a waste to break it."

"Welcome."

"Wh-what was that voice?!"

Now she's looking around. Her scared but wary reaction is kind of adorable.

Anyway, if I let her get away, I'll lose everything. Time to get right to the point.

"Insert coins."

"Eh?! Did this metal box just talk? Coins, as in, like, money?"

I want to answer her questions, but unfortunately, I can only speak in set phrases.

Sorry, but please figure it out yourself. My future existence depends on this.

"U-um, I wonder if a copper coin is enough. Oh, but it probably needs at least a bronze coin...or if a silver isn't enough, then maybe it actually needs a gold...? But I don't have any coins that valuable."

Does that mean this world uses copper, bronze, silver, and gold coins? It sounds like there are coins of even greater value, but anyway, I don't know what the conversion rate from these coins to yen is. If I have to guess from my first impression, maybe a copper coin is worth about ten yen.

"Insert... Where should I put the money? Here's a thin hole, and here's a clear lid with a box-shaped space inside it. One of these?"

I can't tell if she's the type to let her guard down or if she's just incredibly pure-hearted. This girl is standing on pins and needles in this strange situation, but she's still earnestly trying to pay. Her personality doesn't seem too suited to a rough-and-tumble lifestyle. Regardless, I'm mainly thankful to have my first customer.

That's right; just put it into that thin hole there. You're all set—

go for it!

The sound of a clattering coin rings through my body, and I can tell a foreign object has entered. It looks like a copper coin, but if I can get some points with it...

[Currency mismatch. You may accept these coins if you acquire the Currency-Exchange feature.]

For real? You know, I think I've seen that one before. J-just hang on a minute. Uhhh, it was around here... There it is! It only costs one hundred points!

"Oh, I guess a copper coin didn't work. Huh? There are some numbers over here... Ten? Um, if one copper adds ten, then maybe that's related to the numbers under the items. They have one thousand written on them..." She grunts. "So these are one silver. I could eat a whole dinner with one silver..."

Huh? Did the price displays change when I did the currency exchange? Does that mean one copper coin is worth ten yen? A silver is one thousand yen, which is how much it costs to purchase corn soup or milk tea. Wait, why not just keep them at one hundred, then? H-how can I change that?

"B-but I have to make sacrifices to get out of this mess. And I'm really hungry. Money doesn't mean much if I die here. O-okay, leggo!"

That last part was in her accent again. This girl must slip into it when she's excited and can't calm down.

She inserts her coin, and I feel a surge of excitement burn through my body. Great—that was enough. Now pick something!



“These glowing bumps must be how you buy an item... W-well then, um, I guess I’ll go with the one with the picture of soup on it.”

Since people here can’t read Japanese, it’s best to stick with items that are identifiable with a glance. I’ll have to remember that.

Trembling slightly, the girl presses the CORN SOUP button, and the appropriate can falls into the compartment.

“Whoa, what was that?! Something made a noise down there!”

With much trepidation, she peers into the compartment.

That’s it. You’re right. Now gather your courage and take it out.

“Do I have to stick my hand in? It’s not going to eat me if I do, will it?”

I won’t. Just take it already. This corn soup is from a maker I personally recommend. It goes without saying that the taste is great, but I prefer this brand because of how they made the soup.

Everyone who’s had canned corn soup knows that there are always kernels of corn left over inside. This manufacturer put a lot of thought into how to stop that from happening—and came up with a solution.

Other manufacturers have also made the drinking hole bigger. But this one was the first to discard the pull-tab type of can and use a bottle can instead. And by making the lip of the container even bigger, people could enjoy every last bit of corn.

“Oh, got it,” she says, coming out of her accent again. “It’s so warm! Um, should I twist this lid like a bottle to open it? Here goes nothing. Whoa! It smells so good!”

You bet it does. With how big the opening is, the aroma hits you all at once, tickling your nostrils. How many times have I craved it during the colder seasons?

After opening the cap, she puts the bottle can to her mouth and tilts it a little. Immediately, her eyes shoot open, and she takes a big gulp.

“Ahhhhh, that’s so good! What in the world is this? This is leagues better than the places I go to for food!”

Whoa, she drank it all at once. She licks off the soup stuck around the can’s lip, then makes an expression of pure bliss. Damn, why am I so happy? I’m a lucky vending machine to have someone enjoy herself so much.

She sighs. “It’s all gone now. If this one was so delicious, the

others have got to be great, too. The clear one must be water, and the light-brown liquid in that cup... I've gotta try that, too. Yup."

Oh, she put more silver coins in. Afterward, having taken quite a liking to the milk tea, she buys three more cans of corn soup and a bottle of water.

In total, I earned 6,300 yen—or 6 silvers and 30 coppers. After converting, it comes out to 63 points. This price setting seems like it'll do fine even if I leave it.

As though filling her heart and body with soup eased all her tension, the hunter leans her back against me and goes to sleep. She's utterly defenseless like this, but she's also a precious customer. I'll be sure to protect you with Force Field, so rest easy.

Come to think of it, the empty cans and bottles disappeared after she bought them. I've even got garbage disposal covered. A vending machine that's doing its part to keep this other world clean.

Vending Machine on the Move

“Fwah? Oh, did I fall asleep? It’s a good thing no monsters showed up.”

The girl, now awake, puts a hand to her chest and sighs in relief. And her chest—despite how short she is and how young her features are—is incredible. Her leather armor is keeping it in check, but her cleavage is still perfectly visible when looking down at her from above.

“That cost a lot of money, but my stomach’s full and I feel much better. Thanks a ton!”

She bows deeply to me, the vending machine. What a nice girl. I’m the one who should be thanking you. Your money is what gave me more points.

“Thank you.”

I’m so glad someone is giving a vending machine such praise. I can say this much at least, to show my appreciation.

“Huh? Oh, yes. Y-you’re welcome,” she stammers. “Um, can you talk?”

I want to answer, but I can’t. The struggle is real. If I had a body, I’d be writhing in agony. Isn’t there anything I can do to communicate my thoughts, my feelings?

“Um, maybe you can only say certain things? I have a friend. She invents items with magic in them. Her name is Hulemy. Oh, wait, I haven’t even introduced myself yet. I’m Lammis.”

I see, I see. I’ll be sure to remember. My first customer’s name is Lammis. Okay, I won’t forget.

“Anyway, she’s been trying to invent something. She’s researching how to seal a voice inside an object and then get it back out. She was wondering if she could make automatic versions of those people who call out for you to come to their shops. You kind of resemble that. If you meet her, I’d like it if you said something to

her—anything at all.”

Oh, this is my biggest chance yet to communicate! This kid must be pretty sharp. I’ve never been so thankful to be wrong.

“Welcome.”

“Whoa. You understand me! When Hulemy finds out, she’ll be so excited. Oh, I got it! If it’s okay with you, can you say ‘welcome’ when you mean yes? And what should the word for no be?”

What a fantastic idea. Just being able to say yes and no changes the world. Of course I’m more than okay with this.

“Too bad.”

“Pfft. Is that what you’ll say when you mean no?”

“Welcome.”

“That was yes. Okay, got it. Um...can you say your name or anything?”

I want to answer, but I can’t. I hope one day I can talk to her fluently. “Too bad.”

“You can’t say your name? That really is too bad. Oh, right! Why are you here? Are you on an important mission?”

“Too bad.”

“Hmm, what should I ask you? I was just wondering, but...do you get lonely?”

Wait, how would she know something like that? Can Lammi sense this because of a Blessing or something—like being able to understand an inanimate object’s emotions?

“Welcome.”

“I thought so. For some reason you looked real lonely standing by the lake. I thought maybe it was just me, though.”

Did I really seem that mournful? I mean, she’s right—a single vending machine sitting on an empty lakeside is a pretty sad sight.

“Hey, would it be better if you were in a different place?”

“Welcome.”

“Oh, I see! Then, if it’s okay with you, do you want to leave here and go see Hulemy? I think she’ll be able to talk to you.”

“Welcome.”

That would be great, but I don’t think there’s any way for me to move. It’s not like she’s going to carry me. There’s no way one person can carry a whole vending machine by themselves.

“Okay! That’s good. I was nervous about asking because I thought it might bother you. Okay, then. Excuse me for a moment!”

Wait, she’s squatting down. What’s she doing? Hugging me?

She must have turned into quite the vending machine maniac herself. A comrade has appeared!

“Hup, ho!”

Wh-what? Wait, my body’s floating. Hold on a second. Why can this little girl lift me? I must weigh over a thousand pounds!

“You’re a little heavy, but I think I can carry you. One, two!”

Ohhh, we’re moving! She’s walking slowly, but wow, Lammi is amazing. Is this because of that Blessing of Might thing? Her fingers are sticking into me a fair bit, but I can’t possibly ask for more now that she’s carrying me.

Oh, the lake’s getting farther away. It was only a few days, but I’ve been staring at this scenery ever since coming to this world. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t attached to it.

Filled with a flood of emotions, I mentally bow to her in gratitude.

“Thank you.”



“I’m going to take a little break here. Oh, and maybe buy one of those bottles with the thick yellow soup. I’m hungry again.”

Lammi, who has been walking with me in her arms for close to two hours now, sets me down gently behind a giant boulder on a weed-infested grassy plain.

“I wonder if meeting you brought me good luck. We haven’t run into any frog fiends at all, even though this is their turf.”

I don’t think that’s quite accurate. We haven’t run into any battles yet, but I’ve spotted the frog people in the distance several times, watching warily. Maybe word of me got to their friends and they’re all being cautious.

Hmm, did she say she’s hungry? Corn soup alone doesn’t fill up the stomach that much. Don’t I have something more filling?

I have 268 points remaining, so I look over the list of items I can substitute for ten. It hurts to spend them right now, but Lammi will be taking care of me for a bit. I want to do what I can to help.

It should be something high in calories with good texture, right? Sweet red bean soup might be good. It’s sweet, which seems like it would be popular with girls. Oh, wait—I heard once that foreigners don’t like red bean paste very much. Apparently, it resembles mud too much.

Which means I need something else. Hamburgers and cup ramen are options, but I'd need to add on a special function to bring those out. Considering how low I'm running on points at the moment, that's a lot to ask.

Something you can eat from a can... Oh, there is one thing. It's a regional specialty, too. Wait, stocking this costs thirty points, huh? Ahhh, I really wanted to offer cans of oden stew, too. Well, now I know more expensive products cost more points to exchange.

For now, I want to conserve as many points as I can. I'll keep things on the cheap side and not force the matter.

Would that mean something priced one thousand yen, or one silver coin, is better? Oh, I forgot about snacks. Some of them would need special functions, but there is one particular snack that's ever so occasionally lined up next to carbonated drinks in regular vending machines. It's shaped like a can, so it's probably easy to stock.

Hmm... There we are. Unlike regular potato chips, the potatoes in these are molded and pressed, then put into a tube. I'll switch one of my mineral waters out for it.

"Eek! Th-that scared me. Something glowed... Wait, are the items different now? What's this red tube? The picture on it shows a stack of thin, round things. Is it food?"

Lammis's accent had come out again.

"Welcome."

"Oh...um, I see. It's the same price, so I'll buy it."

She's slipped back into normal speech. Her accent is cute, though. I wonder if it bothers her?

After retrieving the chips from the compartment, she struggles valiantly with the red tube before finally managing to open the lid.

"This tube is really well made, and the pictures on it are really detailed, too. They would sell for a high price. No, wait, first let's look inside."

Her appetite appearing to overtake her curiosity, she tears open the paper cover and takes out the contents.

She seems to understand they're snacks, since she plucks one up and bites into it without a second thought. They're the lightly salted flavor.

"Wow! It feels so different. It has a simple taste, but... What are these? I can't stop!"

After shoving a whole bunch into her mouth at once, she buys a bottle of mineral water to go with the treat and washes them down. Has she fallen for the demonic charms of this snack? I love them, too, and frequently ended up devouring a tube twice that size before realizing what happened.

“Aaah, my money’s leaking out like bathwater...but I can’t stop!”

“Thank you.” I make sure to show my appreciation.

My sales this time total 6 silver coins. That’s 6,000 in yen. I got 60 points from it and recovered up to 320.

Oh, right. Now that I can change prices, I’ll change the mineral water to one thousand. Now all the products in the vending machine cost one thousand.

Part of why I made all the prices the same is because it’s a pain to do the calculations otherwise. Also, it costs the same number of points to stock mineral water as it does the corn soup and the milk tea, so that was pricking at my conscience.

If it looks like Lammis will run out of money, I’ll lower all the prices to help out. I know her wallet’s getting lighter pretty quickly, after all. But she’ll have to put up with these prices for a little while longer, since my life is on the line, too.

Stratum Settlement Gatekeepers

“We’ll get to the entrance of this stratum soon. Hang in there a little longer. There’s a settlement there, so we can take it easy.”

Stratum? What’s a stratum? Like a floor? It sounds like she’s talking about the inside of a building or something, but the sky is overhead, so we can’t be indoors, can we?

I don’t really get it, but I’m glad to be somewhere with people. I want to sell a ton and get a bunch of points.

We haven’t been attacked even once since setting off on our trip, so I didn’t have to use Force Field. Monsters only watched from a distance, never rolling up to mess with us. Frog people must have a good information network.

Still, I have to say, Lammi’s incredible strength is one thing, but her endurance is nothing to scoff at, either. She’s fine even after walking for five hours while carrying me. I think she could be an excellent hunter if she goes about it the right way.

“Oh, I can see the settlement! We’re here! We made it back alive!”

Returning to this place was her hope that had been crushed once before, after her party left her behind. Then she found me, and now we’ve finally arrived. I suppose it’s not out of the question that she’d be happy enough to cry.

She’s acting like it’s natural to carry me around, but if someone other than Lammi had found me, they might have destroyed my body to get what was inside. She says she was lucky, but maybe that’s what I should be saying.

Along the trail, I see logs stacked up—a palisade that feels wonderfully homemade. It looks about six feet tall. This settlement must be fairly large.

At what appears to be the entrance are two men wearing dusty

sets of leather armor, one bald and the other with a sort of crew cut. Both are built like pro wrestlers, their presence more than serving their role as lookouts.

“Oh, well if it isn’t Lammis! Alive and well, I see. Your party came back half-dead, so you had me worried!”

The bald man who seems to have a sword scar on his cheek grins in a carefree way, clearly pleased that Lammis is safe. Is he friendlier than he looks?

“Yes, I managed to survive! I’m so sorry for worrying you, Karios.”

She puts me on the ground and bows to him. She’s as polite as she is short.

The man with the crew cut standing next to him narrows his eyes, merely watching their exchange. It almost looks like he’s smiling.

“It’s great that you’re safe and all, but what is that?”

“Oh, this? I think it’s a magic item. I picked it up at the lakeside. When you put money into this kiddo, it spits out goods!”

Kiddo, huh? I mean, I’m sure Lammis is quite a bit younger than me, but if we go by when I was reborn into this world, I’m only a few days old.

“You don’t say? Maybe some magic-item developer left it there as part of a test. Or maybe it’s treasure. I’ve never heard of anything like that on the Clearflow Lake stratum. It’s been five years since we became gatekeepers here... Right, Gorth?”

“Yeah.”

So the skinhead is Karios, and the silent, crew-cut one is Gorth. Looks like Karios is in charge of all the talking. The other one’s barely said a word.

“Is it an invention? Should I have left it there?”

“No, it’s just a theory. ‘Sides, everyone in the dungeon knows that if you find something lying around a stratum, it’s yours.”

Dungeon? Wait, they’ve been talking about strata, too. Is this just one stratum of many inside a dungeon...? But there’s a sky. It definitely doesn’t look like we’re underground. What’s going on with this world?

“Anyway, you pay money to buy something? Can we buy something, too?”

“Yes, I think so. Can they?” asks Lammis, turning around to me. I already have an answer.

“Welcome.”

“Whoa, whoa! Whose voice was that just now?!”

Karios cries out as he jumps back, glancing around. Gorth is staring suspiciously at me. Does he know I was the one who spoke?

“Ah-ha-ha-ha. It’s okay, Karios. This right here is who answered you. Right?”

“Welcome.”

“F-for real? I’ve never heard of a magic item that can talk. Couldn’t you sell that for a lot of money?”

“I-it’s not for sale! This box is going with me to see Hulemy.” Lammi stands in front of me and spreads her arms like she’s protecting me.

Oh, what a good kid. I may need points, but I’m sorry for taking your money away.

“Hulemy’s that crazy magic-item-engineer lady, right? I think she was in the settlement for a while once. She’s sharp as a tack, so maybe that’s a good idea.”

Well, that explanation just makes me feel uneasy. She’s crazy, but she’s also an engineer? That doesn’t bode well. Now I’m not entirely sure I still want to meet her.

“I know! Do you want to buy something?”

“Sure, I’ll try anything. Your recommendations must be safe. If it’s one thousand, that’s one silver? Expensive, but... What does it sell anyway?”

“Um, this is delicious water. And this is sweet, like tea, I think with milk in it. Both are super-cold. The lower row is warm, gooey soup. The red tube is food. It was kind of like fried putetu.”

“So it has both warm things and cool things? I’ll take the soup and the fried stuff. What about you, Gorth?”

“I’ll have sweet tea.”

“Insert coins.”

Both of them twitch in surprise, but at Lammi’s urging, they put their silver coins into the slot.

When I finish dispensing their orders, I make sure to thank them, and say, “Please come again.”

They both got bottle cans, so they opened them easily, but they might not have been able to if those were pull tabs. I should stay away from those kinds of products for a while.

“This soup is real warm.”

“And this is ice-cold.”

Both of them take a gulp at the same time before downing everything all at once. A moment later, their eyes snap wide open.

“What is this?! Hold on a second, this is seriously amazing!”

“Hmm. This is quite good.”

“What about these fried things...? Ohhh, god, these have a simple taste, but I just can’t stop!”

“Give me a few.”

Lammis watches as they devour the pressed potato chips, a happy grin on her face. I’d probably be making the same expression if I could.

Karios wasn’t willing to share, so Gorth bought another tube of chips. Then, seeing how much his partner enjoyed drinking up the milk tea, Karios takes an interest in it as well. One milk tea, coming right up!

They take quite a liking to their purchases, and they buy at least one of everything I have. It seems like Karios’s favorite is the corn soup, and Gorth’s the milk tea.

The sales totaled nine thousand, or nine silver coins. I’ll get ninety points from that. Thank you, my dear customers.

“Man, this is really something. Whoever made that thing’s got tip-top taste, and being able to drink both warm and cool stuff is amazing. Fancy leaving it here? We can’t go anywhere while we’re on lookout duty. It would be real nice if we could have this.”

“Yes.”

Ah, I see. If she sets me up here, they’ll probably buy things on a regular basis. They’ll trade off lookout duties, too, and if the others buy things as well, it might mean steady sales.

“Hmm... Should I? I don’t want to leave this box...”

“Well, then bring it around every now and then. We promise we’ll buy something when you do. And I’ll tell the others, too.”

“It must be difficult to carry like that,” says Gorth. “Why not buy shoulder straps?”

Now that’s a nice idea. I don’t hate being carried like I’m being hugged, but it’ll probably be easier for Lammis to carry me around if I’m strapped to her back.

“Oh, maybe! Are you okay with that?”

“Welcome.”

“You are? Okay, I’ll bring this box around every once in a while!”

“Great, thanks. Now we’ve got something to look forward to

while standing watch.”

“Thanks.”

With this, it looks like I can reasonably expect future sales. Points are my everything, after all. I want to stock some new products and add more functions, too.

To start with, collecting points is my top priority.

“Let’s head to the inn for now. Whatever we do, money comes first...”

Yeah, sorry about that. I put you through a lot of expenses. If I have the leeway, I should give Lammi part of my sales. Can’t I do anything along those lines? I’ll look into it when I have time.

Large tents dot the inside of the settlement. Not the kind of tents you take with you on a day off to go camping, but sturdy, circular ones, the sort nomadic tribes might live in.

Each camp seems to be a shop or a home, and everyone standing at their entrances as we pass by gives us curious stares. I suppose a small girl carrying a boxy hunk of metal would look strange to anyone.

The ground is flat and level. I can’t quite call it paved, but it’s probably easier for Lammi to walk around here than in the wilds.

“Over there is the inn I stay at.”

It’s a two-story wooden building, unusual for the area.

Making Money

“I’m back, ma’am!”

Lammis throws open the inn door, puts me down, and yells a greeting.

In the impressively clean, hall-like area stands a well-built woman holding a broom, her mouth wide-open as she looks this way.

“Y-you’re safe! I was worried. Oh, I hope you’re not a corpse fiend. Are you breathing properly?”

“I’m alive, really! A lot happened, but I managed to make it back.”

The inn’s mistress pats her to confirm as Lammis explains through a wide grin. I don’t know whether this place has a lot of nice people, or if Lammis is just a lovable character, but she doesn’t seem to be in a bad position here.

“Those hunters with you came back all covered in wounds, and they said you were dead. My daughter yelled at them and refused to believe it, though.”

“I know; I worried Munami, too. I’ll have to apologize later—”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh! Lammiiiiiiiis!”

A shout loud enough to shake the hall rattles their shoulders up and down. Lammis turns around and sees the girl coming down the stairs.

She’s carrying a big basket filled with laundry. Her braided hair is tinged with red, and she has a triangle bandanna on her forehead. Her apron has a simple color scheme, the same as the mistress’s. Perhaps it’s the inn’s uniform.

She isn’t much to look at, but while she gives a plain impression, she has sharp eyes that make her seem bright and intelligent. To put it bluntly, she’s like an inconspicuous maid.

But she flies down the stairs in a rush and charges straight for

Lammis before putting the laundry on the floor and grabbing her shoulders.

“Wait, you’re alive! You’re not a corpse fiend, right?!”

“M-Munami, I’m alive—I promise! Look!”

Munami must be the mistress’s daughter. The apple doesn’t fall far—she said exactly the same thing as her mother.

She’s shaking Lammis back and forth so hard it looks like the poor girl’s head will snap off. Maybe you should stop now...

“I swear, Lammis, how much are you going to make me worry? I demanded that the people who went with you tell me everything, and they said they left you by yourself and ran away. I spread the worst rumors I could about them so that they can never live in this settlement again. Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.”

She looks down, her face covered in shadow. Very scary. She must be the type who gets dangerous when she’s mad.

“So that was why you got your things together in a hurry and left...” The mistress sighs.

“By the way, what is that?” asks Munami. “That thing you put in the entrance. It looks really heavy.”

“Oh, I found it by the lakeside.”

“Lammis...you picked up something weird again? Don’t you remember when you brought back that frog-fiend child and caused a huge mess?”

“Y-yeah. B-but this time is different! That baby over there saved me. It’s really useful.”

With both mother and daughter glaring at her, Lammis starts floundering, explaining how she met me, my abilities, and what she plans to do.

“I understand where you’re coming from, but...,” says the mistress. “Lammis, even if you do want to go back to the surface and see Hulemy, what about the money for the transfer circle? And do you have enough to pay for a room at an inn? You look like you lost all your things.”

“Oh, right. I have nothing left... I can’t do anything.”

Bombarded with a stream of questions, Lammis falls to her knees in exhaustion, hanging her head.

...Most of her wallet’s precious contents are inside me. Thinking on the terms I’ve heard in the conversation thus far, we have the surface, a transfer circle, and a dungeon.

We’re inside a dungeon, and to get back to the surface, you

need to use a transfer circle. And you need a significant amount of money to use it. Finally, Lammis is flat broke. My bad.

Inside a dungeon, huh? It doesn't feel like we are, but I'm a vending machine anyway, so... At this point, common sense and things not making sense to me aren't important. I just have to accept how things are.

Even though I want to cut into their conversation, if all I can say is "Welcome," "Thank you," "Please come again," "Get one free with a winner," "Too bad," "You're a winner," and "Insert coins," what am I supposed to do?

Meanwhile, the conversation is drawing to a close.

"Well, there's nothing for it, is there? You'll have to work here at the inn for a while. I wonder whether that box can attract customers if you put it outside. It'll sell what it has, too. Two birds with one stone."

I could wish for nothing better. "Welcome."

"Whoa, it really can talk, can't it? I'll leave attracting customers to you, then."

"Oh, but Karios the gatekeeper asked me to bring it over that way every once in a while."

"That's fine. I don't mind you slipping out to bring it there and come back."

"Yes, ma'am!"

And that was how my life in this settlement began.

The settlement houses only around a hundred people, but the residents change by the day. As far as I can tell, the only permanent ones are the ones doing business geared toward hunters.

Hunters are people who put down monsters, collect materials, take on escort requests, or explore the dungeon in the hope of finding rare treasures worth entire fortunes. The Hunters Association has a branch here in the settlement as well. They hand out quests to the hunters and buy their materials.

Oh, right. Apparently, this is one of the dungeon's floors, or strata, called Clearflow Lake. Being inside a dungeon with a sky... All I can say is that other worlds are amazing.

I hear that it takes three weeks just to go from one end of this stratum to the other. The main creatures living here are the fish and shellfish in Clearflow Lake proper, plus the frog people they call frog fiends. Apparently, there are creatures called the Three Powers

as well, but I don't know much about them.

My sources of information are, incidentally, listening to Lammis chat about something or other every day, eavesdropping on the inn patrons, and—

“So I say to the guy, ‘Hey, it’s our *job* to protect this place from outlaws.’”

—Karios, who works as a gatekeeper. He seems to have free time in spades, and he frequently starts talking to me whenever I’m set up near the gate.

“Welcome.”

“Right, so those frog heads have been more active lately, so we’ve been seeing more injured people. It’s always around this time they send out a big hunting party to deal with them.”

“Welcome.”

It seems like I just need to put in a word or two every now and then to show him I’m listening, and I have to admit, it’s easy to just keep saying “Welcome.”

A hunting party... It’s only been a week since I got here, but I have been seeing new hunters showing up often lately.

“And now I’m thirsty, but I’m getting tired of the same old drinks.”

Well, that’s because you buy at least five of them every day. Though maybe it is about time I stock something new. I’ve built up a fair supply of points, after all. I instantly became famous over the past week for my uniqueness and the flavor of my products, so I’ve had surprisingly good sales. Let’s take a look-see.

[Vending Machine]

~~(C)000160 (X160)~~

~~(C)000150a(x24)~~

~~(W)000150a(x19)~~

~~(M)000160 (P360)~~ Chips

PT 3,253

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention

{Blessings} Force Field

Thanks to refilling several times and selling over four hundred items, I have more than three thousand points now. I’ve been saving them up, since there’s no telling what’s to come, but I’m getting an

itch to add a new feature, too.

Even the cheaper features that I want cost a thousand points to add, so I've been sitting on the fence about it, but I should be able to buy at least one without worrying too much.

Wait, maybe I should do the reasonable thing and get different products. For example, if I get the cup ramen Hot-Water-Dispenser feature, it would change my vending machine body. I'm nervous about it affecting the other items, but... No, I can already put up barriers, add features at will, and my human mind resides within a vending machine. Maybe I shouldn't be worrying about something so sensible.

Now, then. Rather than letting my thoughts roam free, I should consider the needs of my customers first. The gatekeepers, Karios and Gorth, are my most frequent users. Let's think about what they might want.

I recall they wanted something more filling. I'd like to offer them cans of oden stew, but will they be able to open them? It doesn't look like pull tabs are common in this world like they were in mine, and I can't give detailed explanations, either.

I suppose I have to give up... No wait, that could work!

Remembering something, I search through the list of makers, find what I'm after, and use thirty points to add one hundred cans of oden.

"Whoa, you lit up. And now there's a new item in ya. The price... Three thousand, eh? Three silvers is a bit steep. But there's something new to buy, so I can't hold back!"

I feel you. I totally understand. A new item in a vending machine is a terrible magic. I empathize so much it hurts. All the more if the container has a delicious-looking photo of rising steam printed on it—I wouldn't have been able to resist.

Come to think of it, the fact that they understand the numbers but not any of the letters still feels weird to me, but that just brings up the question of why those characters are there at all. I'll just chalk it up to some sorcery at work.

The strata in this dungeon, compared to the outside world, seem to be easier places to save up money, but it's probably more dangerous as well. For those who can dance around the high-risk,

high-return investment effectively, it certainly seems like people don't have any financial issues.

That's why the merchants here have chosen to do business in a dangerous land. They can sell everything for a higher price than on the surface, and it's more likely they'll come across precious goods.

The gatekeepers protecting the settlement itself seem to be compensated handsomely, which is why they favor me with their business so much. I don't think this price setting would work if I were dropped in a safe town on the surface.

"Oh, this one's hot. Wait, how do you open it?"

I thought that would trip him up. But take a good look at the can. I know from this past week that Karios and Gorth are both very observant, so I'm hopeful.

Karios picks up the can in his fingers and looks at it closely. Gorth takes interest as well and watches out of the corner of his eye. After turning the can around once, both of them seem to notice.

"Hmm? There's a picture on here. Is this how to open it and how to eat what's inside?"

That's right. This manufacturer's oden is made for people who aren't familiar with the packaging, and it has a detailed explanation drawn on the side.

After a certain place in Tokyo nicknamed "electric town" popularized it, canned oden spread overseas as well. Enthusiastic tourists started buying it, but many foreigners didn't know how to eat it, which led to an outbreak of burning incidents. This manufacturer decided to put a clear set of easy-to-understand instructions on the can so even people who didn't understand the language could still figure it out.

"Hmm. So you give the thing on top a little bend, and a pull... Whoa, now that's a good smell! And then you push it all the way up, and it's open!"

Great, phase one is complete. Now I can provide cans of this type to these two. My product lineup is getting bigger. They'll spread the word to the others, so in a few weeks, most of my regulars should be able to handle it.

Karios pulls out one of the skewers stuck in the oden to make it easier to eat. It's got the golden trio on it: quail egg, *chikuwa* fish cake, and *konjak* cake.

As a thin trail of steam rises from the skewer, he puts it in his

mouth, biting into the quail egg sitting at the top first. After chewing twice, steam erupts from his nostrils and he squints. “Oh, oh, wow. This is insanely good. This might be my new favorite. The boiled egg has a complex flavor, but it’s still light inside, and the moment I put it in my mouth, the juice mixed with the yolk just flows right out... Man, this is good! I bet it would go great with booze.”

Finished with the quail egg, he takes a bite of the *chikuwa*.

“Shoot, this has a ton of flavor, too. Irresistible! I’ve never had something with a texture like this before, but it tastes vaguely fishy. How on earth do they make these? Under that is... Oh, whoa, it’s soft like jelly, but I still like it. Ha-ha-ha. Interesting!”

It looks like Karios is enjoying the *chikuwa* and the konjak, too. He drinks up all the soup stock as well. Then, with a satisfied look, he fishes three more silver coins out of his wallet before Gorth interrupts and inserts his own coins.

“H-hey, I was just about to buy one!”

“I’m next.”

That had the perfect effect on them. Looks like I can expect these cans of oden to sell.

That was how word of the oden got out and caused a local boom in Clearflow Lake. The recent weather—considering how cold it’s been getting—contributed to my sales, too, so I should be able to look forward to further success.

A Day in the Life of a Vending Machine

My daily schedule since arriving here goes like this...

It starts early in the morning in front of the inn. I don't have to rest at night, but I recently learned how to go into sleep mode, which lets me consume only half the usual points. It's no problem at all if I don't sleep, but for some reason it feels good when I wake up.

"Good morning, Boxxo!"

I hear Lammis's voice, full of life even this early. These days, she's been mostly wearing the inn's worker uniform.

To catch you up, Boxxo seems to be my name now. Lammis was the one who christened me, obviously. When she heard the innkeeper's daughter, Munami, calling me "Box," she said it didn't sound cute, so she named me Boxxo instead.

I have some doubts about her naming sense, to be honest, but with how happy her face looked at the time, there was really nothing I could do but accept it with a "Welcome."

"Let's do our best again today!"

"Welcome."

As she wipes me down with a cloth, she starts talking to me like always. I feel like she's more cut out to be an employee at the inn than a hunter risking life and limb for money, but I'm sure she has her own thoughts on that.

With both of us preparing to work hard again today, I drop a sports drink—a new product I started stocking a few days ago—into my compartment.

"Is it okay to have another one today?"

"Welcome."

"Thanks!"

Just looking at her drinking it so happily gives my mechanical body a warm feeling. I think.

Lately, I've learned a lot about my new body—the inner workings of the vending machine—and I figured out how to give items for free.

Every nook and cranny of my body is clean, sparkling in the morning sun. Now I'm ready for another full day of work.

A few minutes after she goes back inside the inn, my regulars appear in front of me.

"Welcome."

"Yes, good morning. I just can't start the day without having some of this soup."

"You too, Granny? I love this sweet tea so much that I can't get motivated without drinking some."

"You've got it all wrong. Water is best in the morning. A bottle of it to wake you up is the greatest feeling."

An old married couple and a skinny young man are chatting.

From what I recall, the old couple makes a living teaching hunters how to train and use their Blessings. Rumor has it they were both incredibly skilled hunters back in their heyday.

The young man is son and heir to a nearby tool shop and always comes to the cafeteria on the first floor of the inn to eat when lunchtime rolls around. According to Lammis, he has a thing for the innkeeper's poster girl, Munami.

"Thank you. Please come again."

I give my usual thanks to the three of them and watch as they walk away.

Then, as though they timed it right when they went out of sight, four stalwart men appear.

"Phew. Glad the night shift's over with. What should I have today?"

"Welcome."

It's Karios's group, the number-one contributors to my sales. They're in charge of the settlement's gates as well as peacekeeping inside them. All four frequently come by when their shifts change.

As usual, they purchase their beverages and pressed potato chips, then head out. Now is when I have free time. Incidentally, I don't stock cans of oden when I'm in front of the inn in the morning. They provide breakfast inside, and I don't want to interfere with their business.



After the start of business in the morning, customers become more irregular, coming in bit by bit. My prices are a little high, and only so many regularly buy anything. Most customers buy two or three things a week.

A little before noon, groups of people equipped with armor and weapons start to appear from the direction of the local branch of the Hunters Association.

“We’ll be back before tomorrow, but don’t forget to buy some water. If you have room in your pockets, buy a can of cooked food or a red tube, too.”

“Um, how do you buy things from this?”

“You don’t know? Guess I’ll have to teach you.”

A man with a stubbly beard dressed in black armor, who seems to be the group’s leader, explains the process to them a little boastfully. I remember him—he came to the vending machine four days ago, timing it so that nobody else was around, timid and trembling as he bought items.

He practiced this beforehand. Mysteriously, his stern features have somehow started seeming cute to me.

My products are airtight and disappear immediately after use, making them popular among hunters heading out to explore or to slay monsters. Female hunters seem to love the tea, and I’ve heard rumors that they’ve split up into a lemon-tea side and a milk-tea side.

I’ve been offering coffee, too, but it’s not very popular. One or two of my customers are passionate about it, though, so I won’t pull it, but I might want to exchange it for café au lait.

This is the time when hunters who often sleep late come shopping, so I usually put the cans of oden back on sale.

When noon comes around, I pull the oden again. This is the busiest time for the inn’s cafeteria, so I set to work attracting customers by saying “Welcome” to bring as many inside for lunch as I can. And I never forget to send them off with a “Thank you” when they’re finished eating.

Once lunchtime is over and foot traffic becomes scarce, I can’t miss something small moving around in my peripheral vision.

The little rascal is here again. There is a girl who will basically always come around this time of day. Just the sight of her light-brown twin-tails makes the kid look sassy. She’s probably around

ten years old.

Her clothing is fairly well tailored compared to the rest of the settlement's. She seems like the quintessential spoiled highborn girl.

Wooden walls may surround the place, but monsters are on the prowl beyond them—the settlement can't be called safe by any stretch of the imagination. At first, I couldn't help finding it odd that a child like her is here, but apparently, she's the granddaughter of a wealthy merchant who runs a large, stone-built shop here.

I noticed her only a few days ago, but she seems to be strolling about the settlement as she pleases, though several bodyguards always follow at a distance. Well, I only know they're bodyguards because one of the black-clothed men tailing her once bought a milk tea from me and complained about her.

"Lady Suori's tomboyish attitude is such a pain," he said. "If she were a little more ladylike, our jobs would be so much easier."

At the time, I sympathized with the man in black, but now I just want to shout at him to discipline her properly. This Suori brat is far beyond the realm of just being playful.

When I first saw her, she was staring at me mesmerized. When I invited her with a "Welcome," she muttered, "My plan to be the first one to talk and have an advantage in negotiations has failed!" and ran away. When I heard her voice, I realized it was the girl Lammis had saved. That surprised me. At the time, I couldn't see her face very well under her hat.

The problems started the next day. If she had stayed far away to puff out her cheeks and glare at me, that would have been fine. But she picked up a stone at her feet and threw it at me for some unknown reason. A weak girl throwing a rock at me didn't even scratch me, but it made me mad. Still, I decided to overlook it, since she was a little kid, but then we come to the day after that.

She came right up to me with a bag on her shoulder. I thought she was about to buy something, but instead, she dumped a pile of pebbles out of her bag and into my compartment. That was the straw that broke the camel's back, so at my loudest volume, I said:

"Insert coins."

The up-close shout seemed to startle her. She fell right onto her backside.

"H-how rude! Who...? Just wh-who do you think I am, huh?!"

She spoke in an odd tone of voice but looked crazy angry. Then four men and women in black jumped out and grabbed her. It

wasn't a fun sight to behold.

She cried out for someone to destroy me, but the people in black dragged her away and things settled down. But that's when the situation went downhill.

Apparently, Suori's a very prideful girl and wouldn't forgive me for frightening her. Her pranks got worse by the day. Once, she tried to throw a paint-like substance onto me, but I surprised her again and it ended up all over her. Another time, she tried to damage me with a thick branch, but she tripped and started crying. None of it had gone well for her, but it was too much for me to laugh off as though she were only pretending to be some brave warrior.

I'm on my guard for what she'll bring to the table today...but she's got her head down, plodding along on her lonely way. It would be a great performance if she was faking it, but I don't think a kid with such an easy-to-read personality could pull off an act that clever.

Hmm... She's standing in front of me, but she's not trying to pull any pranks, right? The young girl just stands there, staring without seeing. When she looks up, I can see red around her eyes like she's been crying. Maybe there was some trouble at home.



Seeing someone who's normally annoyingly energetic looking so down—it makes me want to do something for her. I guess that's human nature. All right, all right. Time to show her a grown-up's generosity.

I'll look through my list of items and pick something I think a kid would like. Orange juice should be appropriate—and not 100 percent or anything, but the kind with a lot of sugar.

I guess that means going with that one famous maker from the commercials. Here we go. I stock the orange juice for the first time and drop one into my compartment.

“Huh? What was that?”

“Welcome.”

It's my treat today, young lady. Next time, use your own money to buy one like before.

“Is it okay for me to have it for free?”

Isn't that a cute face? Holding her orange juice all surprised like that. She's always wearing an angry, sulking, or pouting face, but things look hopeful for her future.

“U-um, thank you.”

“Please come again.”

Before evening sets in, Lammis puts me on her back and carries me to the gate. It had been inconvenient to carry me around in her arms, so she bought a modified wooden rack for carrying loads, allowing her to move me around much more smoothly.

I stand quietly after Lammis gently places me next to the gate. At night, I always stay here until the cafeteria and pub at the inn close up. The inn's mistress bought a large quantity of pressed potato chips and cans of oden, too, providing them as snacks to go with their drinks.

Out of gratitude to the inn for taking such good care of me, as a sort of payment, I mark everything down to half price whenever the mistress buys from me.

“Phew, it's cold out. Oh, you get something new again? Wait, the blue button means it's a cool one, right? It looks good, but I'll pass. I'll just get the usual soup.”

“I'll have the warm sweet tea.”

“Wait! There was *warm* sweet tea in here?! Damn, I'll buy that after.”

I have stocked a warm version of the milk tea, so thank you for your patronage.

I'm thankful that Karios and Gorth both buy quite a bit every time Lammis brings me by, but I worry about how their wallets are doing. I hear the gatekeepers have a considerable income, though, so they'll probably be fine... Of course, maybe it's stranger for me to worry about them when I'm the reason they're spending all their money.

I'm positioned next to the gate only partly because those tending it think so highly of my products—another big factor is that for some reason, there's been this superstition going around that the frog fiends never attack while I'm here.

"Boxxo! Time to go home!"

Oh, Lammis is calling. Is she finished with her shift at the inn? That means the end of my workday, too.

The warm beverages that the two guards bought are my last sales of the day.

Lammis places me on the wooden harness again, then easily lifts me with strength that's unimaginable from only looking at her slight frame. The two of us—one girl and one machine—head back toward the inn from the gate.

"We had a funny customer at the inn today. She's a hunter. It's her first time going into the labyrinth, and she was really energetic and about the same age as me."

"Welcome."

Come to think of it, how old is Lammis actually? I assumed she's around fifteen or sixteen, but she could actually be a little younger or older than that.

"How was your day, Boxxo?"

"Get one free with a winner."

"It was fun? I hope you can talk a whole lot someday. But first I have to save up money so we can go see Hulemy soon. When we do, I'm sure you'll learn how to do lots of new things!"

She feels indebted to me for saving her life and is trying her hardest for me, but I'm the one who had been saved. If not for Lammis, I'd be broken down right on that lakeside by now.

I'm the one who should be grateful. Seriously.

"Thank you."

"What's wrong? You don't need to thank me. You're the one who rescued me, Boxxo. Thanks!"

All I can do for her is follow along with whatever silly things she's saying, but she always smiles as though she's happy with that, and that's enough for me.

My situation is baffling: I'm a vending machine in another world. But I'm starting to think this kind of life isn't all that bad. If I had a face, I'd be wryly smiling right now.

It may be a strange environment, but if this is what my days will be like, I'd like it to stay this way. I really would.

The Director

Today I wake up refreshed once more, in front of the inn.

When I first started working around here, a few people were trying to steal me, but lately, it's been peaceful. The young lady with the light-brown twin-tails stopped causing mischief as well. Now she buys things from me like everyone else.

She seems to have taken quite a liking to the orange juice, so maybe I'll add more varieties of it soon.

Normally, the old couple and the young merchant come around at this time, but today I have a different visitor... But why are they staring at me, standing still as a rock?

My body has an average-ish vending machine height of nearly six feet, but the giant bear in front of me is a head taller. I'm referring to him as a bear because he's actually a bear.

The giant, black-furred bear is wearing a long coat with a hood. This is no lie, or joke, or metaphor. He is, without a doubt, an actual bear. You'd think a scene like this would normally cause havoc in the settlement, but the people walking by spare him only passing glances. Nobody seems surprised.

Does that mean bear people aren't particularly unusual in this world? There are frog people, so maybe...?

"Oh! What are you doing in a place like this, Director?"

Lammis throws open the inn's door with ruthless force and calls out in her usual voice, brimming with energy.

She just called this bear "Director." This gives me the impression that he's a very important person. Now that Lammis mentions it, I can't say I *don't* sense a certain intelligence coming from him.

"Hmm. Lammis?"

What a deep voice. It exudes an incredible presence, just like his appearance. He said only one word, but he seems like a boss you

can rely on.

“Unusual for the director of the Hunters Association to come all the way out here.”

“Hmm. I came today with a request for the sentient magic item.”

Wait, me? The director of the Hunters Association must be a pretty influential person. What could someone like that want with me?

“Oh, you’re here for Boxxo? Instead of standing around outside, let’s go inside! I’ll carry Boxxo in. Hup, ho!”

Without realizing it, I’ve already gotten used to being carried. I feel like a sick person being cared for, but I certainly can’t move by myself. The goings-on of daily life are making me realize more and more how important this young girl is to me.

She moves aside one of the chairs from the inn’s round table and places me down there; Director Bear goes to the other side across from me. The giant sits in the seat with a bump and a creak.

And I notice Lammis has occupied the space to my right.

“Your Might would be quite beneficial as a hunter. Have you no intention of returning?”

“I like my job at the inn right now, and even if I went back to being a hunter, nobody would team up with me...”

“Hmm. I don’t believe that’s true, but feel free to return whenever you like.”

“Thank you, Director.”

Director Bear nods magnanimously. Lammis mentioned before about being a dropout hunter, but the director seems to hold a high opinion of her. If she could team up with others who complement her, I think her talents would really blossom.

“In any case, I’ll get to the point. Recently, we’ve been planning to raid a frog-fiend nest, but we’d like you—Boxxo, was it?—to join us.”

The proposition completely blindsides me. He can’t be expecting any combat ability from me.

“What? But Boxxo can’t fight.”

“I am aware. I would like him to provide food and drink while the party is in the field. We will prepare more than enough rations, but there is no telling what will happen in battle. Warm food that can be eaten immediately would be a great boon to the hunters. Of course, I will ensure all who buy something pay the proper price. In

addition to that, I would prepare a reward. How does this sound?"

It doesn't seem to me like a bad deal. The frog fiends act rather guarded in my presence, so I don't think they'd likely target me. Plus, the hunters would probably buy a lot.

But how do they plan on transporting me? I guess if they put me on a horse-drawn cart, it wouldn't be a problem.

"Do you want to accept the request, Boxxo?"

"Welcome," I answer right away. If I'm going to continue living in this settlement, it wouldn't be bad to do some self-promotion by helping the Hunters Association's director. This is a chance to gain fame and pick up a lot of extra cash, too. I'll give them a taste of my products and get them all hooked.

"You want to go, Boxxo? Then I'll join, too!"

Lammis shoots her hand into the air, which is fine, but I don't want her to get involved with anything dangerous. I think she's more suited to working at the inn here than being a hunter.

"You will come as well, Lammis? Can I put you in charge of Boxxo's transport and provision of food?"

"Yes, sir! Leave Boxxo to me!"

If she'll be with me, she probably won't carry me into danger. And if push comes to shove, I'll protect her with Force Field. We'll probably be all right.

Besides, if I don't help them deal with the frog fiends, it'll put the settlement in danger. In the end, Lammis wouldn't be safe anymore.

After wrapping up our conversation, Director Bear leaves the inn. The raid is three days from now, so I should get ready as well. This is a good time to stock more food items. I'll test out some different things in the next three days and see what sticks.



The aforementioned three days have passed.

I'm already fitted in the wooden harness. Men and women are all standing around—about thirty hunters. They're leaving only the bare minimum garrison behind for defense; most of the hunters here are apparently part of the mission.

The settlement's continued existence is important, but apparently the one thing we absolutely can't yield is the transfer circle inside it. The transfer circle is a magical device that allows

you to directly warp from the surface to this stratum, Clearflow Lake.

People come here from higher strata as well. Each stratum has something called a stratum lord—when hunters defeat it, a transfer circle appears. This system allows them to move to the next stratum.

It's possible to use the transfer circle without slaying the stratum lord by paying money; so as long as someone's already beaten the lord and revealed the circle, anyone can travel to other strata.

As a general rule, stronger monsters appear the deeper you go, but it depends on the stratum. Certain places aren't home to many powerful creatures and are easy for hunters to make a living in. Clearflow Lake is one of those safer strata. As an aside, this information is all from Karios, who told me about it once.

Still, Munami told me something else—that the frog fiends don't have a terrifying mob mentality or anything like that. It's just that when mating season comes around, they lay a lot of eggs that turn into adults very quickly, so the period of time before winter sets in is the most troubling.

“Ugh, it's that time of year again, huh?”

“Well, it's a good source of income. Time to make us some money.”

A pair of warriors—in their thirties, from the looks of it, and veterans, surely—are making small talk. They don't seem terribly reliable. Apparently, this is a yearly affair, and many hunters visit the settlement this time of year. The merchants see a spike in sales, too.

“L-let's take it one step at a time. We shouldn't push things too much.”

“Yeah. We can still make a profit by going after the stragglers, right?”

A handful of fresh new faces are participating as well, and they seem rather nervous for their first joint venture.

With this many people, I think the frog fiends don't stand much of a chance, but if there is one thing I'm worried about, it's that I've been hearing that they're more populous and active compared with previous years.

In the worst-case scenario, I'll just focus on protecting Lammi

as we retreat...but I really do want that one-billion-point transformation.

“Are you comfortable in there, Boxxo?”

“Welcome.”

Considerate as always, she checks up on me, but it looks like she’s doing it to relieve some of her own tension as well. I think there’s a little less blood in her face than usual.

I remember a friend of mine, a military maniac, playing a game along these lines with units that carried food and goods. What were they called again—logistics teams? This type of unit generally doesn’t take part in the battles, and rather than using horse-pulled carts, the guys we’ll be accompanying use these giant boars with horns on their foreheads for carrying supplies.

They seem to understand how vital rations are for fighting, too, so we have no fewer than six hunters with us for protection.

“Don’t get too tense. We’re skilled—well, about middle-of-the-road. Those frog fiends won’t be getting the better of us.”

A rowdy-looking man with a wide-brimmed hat and a stubbly beard talks to Lammis. He looks like a gunman out of a cowboy film, but instead of a gun on his waist, he’s wearing two short swords.

He’s the leader of the team of six assigned to escort us, and seems the type of person who’s moderately relaxed in these situations, both physically and mentally. I’ve never seen him before now, so he’s probably one of the hunters who temporarily came to assist us in this subjugation mission.

“Thank you!” Lammis quickly bends at the waist in gratitude, which swings me down at the same time. The man hops back before I hit him.

“Whoops. So this is the sentient box I’ve heard so much about, eh? It’s the talk of the settlement.”

“The name is Boxxo, sir. You can put money into the coin slot, and then when you press the bump under the item you want, it’ll come out.”

Lammis is getting used to explaining this as well. At first, there were a lot of people who didn’t know how to use me, so she demonstrated. Once more people became familiar with me, she wrote some simple instructions on a sign and attached it to my side; residents who saw it would nervously try it out themselves. It’s a rather fond memory for me at this point.

“Ho! Sounds convenient. We can get food and drinks right away while exploring or fighting. It’s a bit, er, *massive*, unfortunately, but hiring someone like you to carry him makes it very useful indeed.”

I’m fine with him being impressed, but I see a glint of dim light in his eyes. That look reminds me of the guys who tried to steal me and failed. I should be careful around this man.

“Oh! I bet you just thought you wanted to have Boxxo for yourself. But you can’t, because he’s my friend.”

Once again, I’m struck by Lammis’s acumen. Given her personality, of course, she doesn’t use it to her fullest.

“Whoa, guess the cat’s out of the bag. Still, it would be pretty convenient to have this guy—Boxxo, was it?—around our place, too. Well, why don’t I buy something as a symbol of our meeting? Don’t need water... I’ll take this one, with the picture that looks like limun slices.”

“That’s the cold version. The red bump underneath is the warm one.”

“Oh, is that right? Thanks.”

The man seems to have settled on the lemon tea. He’s got a shady air about him, but a customer is a customer. I’ll still give him the product.

Once the man retrieves it from my compartment, I thank him, saying, “Thank you. Please come again.”

“Shoot, it really can talk. What a find. Never seen a container like this, either. He’s not drawing every single one of these detailed pictures, is he? What’s that about?”

“Well, you got me there. Oh, and it’ll go *poof* after you drink it, so you don’t needa worry about where to toss your trash.”

Lammis has reverted to her informal way of talking. It seems like she tries extra hard to be polite to people at first but then eases into a more straightforward manner—both a flaw and a charm. I think her natural way of talking is more attractive. And I don’t hate her native accent, either.

“For real? Guess all that’s left is to taste it... Damn, that’s good. Warm and delicious. If they put you in a rich stratum, they’d clean you right out. Wait, how is this item restocked?”

This man’s questions are right on the mark. I know he’s very curious, but I can practically see the calculator working in his mind. He seems to have a mind for moneymaking.

“Well, you see, I’ve never refilled Boxxo. He’s sold over a

hundred things now. Isn't that mysterious?"

"This box is getting more interesting by the minute. Hey, Filmina, you were listening, right? Come over here for a sec."

"What is it, Captain Kerioyl? Also, please stop yelling."

A woman with blue hair, styled in a wavy, delicate perm, appears at his call. Her eyebrows are long and slender. The corners of her eyes are angled up slightly, giving me the impression that she's a headstrong person. It would be a real shame to have her beauty diluted by a poor personality.

She's holding a gnarled wooden staff in her hand, and she's wearing a clear blue, robe-like garment. Filmina looks a lot like a magician—the kind that uses water magic.

"You know a ton about magic items and ancient treasures and stuff, yeah? Can you figure out anything about this Boxxo here?"

"I've been probing for a while, but I don't feel any mana from it. It seems like it's just a lifeless hunk of metal."

Well, I mean, I *am* a vending machine.

"But it still gives you items without anyone refilling it. The thing must be getting its supply from teleportation or another dimension, right?"

"Normally, yes, but certain Blessings won't produce any mana, either. Besides, there's no way a piece of metal could use a Blessing."

Um, actually, I can use a Blessing. As I thought, a vending machine being able to use one is strange...though I knew that. I should refrain from using Force Field for a while and see how things shake out.

"Everything about it is unusual. I don't get it, but if it'll help us out, I'm grateful. Pleasure to be working with you, Boxxo."

"Thank you."

The man is suspicious, but he bought something, so I have to thank him. And maybe keep an eye on him, too, so that he doesn't deceive Lammis somehow.

The Hunting Team

The frog fiends' nest, or rather their settlement, is about an hour north from the spot by the lake I was on, or so I hear.

That must be why they kept coming over for a look. If I had picked the wrong Blessing at the time, there's a strong chance I might be scrap right about now. It's a good thing I didn't pick a combat ability...even though I don't think I could use one with a vending machine for a body anyway.

"Welcome."

"Thank you."

"Please come again."

Still, business is booming, and I don't have time to think about it much. I've been at full speed for a while, giving out an endless string of thanks.

When noon came around, the party of hunters began to break for lunch, getting out the food they'd brought or using some of the many ingredients stored in our cargo. But after a word from Lammis, I suddenly had a lot more customers.

"This pasta dish is heavenly!"

That's right. Out of consideration for the long trip we'd be taking, I used one thousand points to add on a new function. Mornings and evenings are starting to get chilly, so I picked a hot-water-dispensing function, and I added four types of cup ramen as well. *Kitsune*-style udon, soy sauce ramen, pork bone ramen, and salt ramen—a lineup that lets people choose whatever they like.

Of course, I was dealing with ignorant people from a different world, so I chose simple items that only needed hot water added to them. These had instructions in both words and pictures on the sides of the containers, so Lammis and Munami had figured it out right away.

After changing to cup ramen mode, the water-dispensing

function takes up half the vending machine, so one downside might be that there's less room for beverages. However, I can switch freely in and out of cup ramen mode, so I can go back to normal right away.

Today it's cloudy, and with the chill making things difficult, seeing Lammis happily eating the noodles brought on a surge of customers.

As a side note, I've set each cup ramen to two silver coins. Taking all the necessary measures, I've provided the optional fork with the cup ramen as well.

"Whew! This warms me right to the core."

"I feel this big brown one's taste in my heart. Delicious!"

"Yours looks good. Let's trade bites!"

The hunters eat in a lively group, sharing their impressions. In a flash, they buy no fewer than forty cups of ramen and drinks. Considering they are in a physically active profession, it's not strange that a lot of them eat two cups or more by themselves.

Given that they planned to travel two days out from the settlement on foot, they had plenty of extra food stored, but it seems like a basic rule that hunters eat simple, basic lunches; this combined with their curiosity over the cup ramen is what's netting me sales.

Of course, it goes without saying how wonderful the flavors are—the makers created them after much trial and error. Tasting the fullness of something so high quality makes me truly glad to have been a Japanese person.

At this rate, I'm going to make a huge haul during this trip. I could set the prices to three silver coins each, but wiping out the frog fiends takes priority, so I keep the markup low in order to support the hunters.

We're at the back end of the hunting team, and thus removed from the actual fighting. Not that there's much—we've heard shouts and weapons clashing from the front line only a few times so far. Other than that, it's been supremely peaceful.

Nobody will be buying anything while we're physically on the move, so I use that time to check back over all my abilities and consider how to proceed from here.

My full status display looks something like this:

[Vending Machine: Boxxo]

DUR 100/100

TGH 10

STR 0

SPD 0

DEX 0

MAG 0

PT 3,600

~~(1,000)~~ 160 (x130)

~~(1,000)~~ 180 (x24)

~~(1,000)~~ 160 (x65)

~~(1,000)~~ 150 (x78)

~~(1,000)~~ 180 (x65)

~~(1,000)~~ 150 (x19)

~~(1,000)~~ 160 (x56)

~~(1,000)~~ 160 (x36) Chips

~~(2,000)~~ 250 (x85) Sune-Style

~~(2,000)~~ 250 (x92) Pork Bone Flavor

~~(2,000)~~ 250 (x88) Soy Sauce Flavor

~~(2,000)~~ 250 (x89) Salt Flavor

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention,

Hot-Water Dispenser (Cup Ramen Mode)

{Blessings} Force Field

There are too many things to fit on the display at once. I should probably check each item individually.

I'll keep myself in cup ramen mode for as long as I'm accompanying this hunter team and have one of each beverage in the lineup.

Adding that function makes my appearance change instantly, like magic. That might mean I can find design-changing and form-changing functions in the upgrade list, too... Found it.

Oh, wow. Freely changing my color? I can add patterns, button designs, and even an electronic sign? That's a lot of customization.

Changing colors doesn't seem to cost that many points, but the ones that change my form and add the sign are fairly pricey. I'll get them once I have more to spare.

Time passes quickly as I look at all the different add-ons I can get. The next thing I know, it's gotten dark out.

"We're spending the night here. Get to setting up camp,

everyone.”

Is that austere voice the Hunters Association director’s? Right, he’s part of the hunting team, too, isn’t he? He used to be an extremely good hunter, I hear, and a cut above all the rest of the members present, in terms of ability.

Some groups are setting up tents, but many hunters are simply sitting in front of a fire. Are they going to make do with just sleeping rolls or blankets? I wonder what Lammis is going to do...? When I look over, she’s just sitting next to me with a smile on her face...

...It may look like she’s spacing out, but she technically used to be a hunter, so that can’t be true. Then again, I don’t think she brought along any luggage at all, besides lugging me on her back. Is she going to be all right?

Completely unaware of my worries, she’s racking her brain over what to buy. The others will be engaging in a decisive battle tomorrow, and the dinner they made tonight is rather lavish.

Most of them buy only a drink; the oden and cup ramen aren’t selling much. They must want to use up their food so that they have less to carry.

“I really like the skewer one. They should make one that only has the little eggs on it.”

So Lammis is an egg person? Quail eggs are expensive, so if I offer an item with only eggs, it’ll probably cost more to stock. Personally, I think stuffed tofu and daikon are irreplaceable in oden.

For dinner, she has oden, milk tea, and *kitsune*-style udon. Not sure whether that’s a balanced diet or not.

“Do you have a moment?”

All of a sudden, like a towering giant, the director is standing behind Lammis.

I didn’t notice him getting this close at all. Those rumors about him having been a skilled hunter must not be all talk.

“Do you want to buy something, Director?”

“Perhaps I’ll have the yellow soup later. More importantly, about tomorrow... We should arrive at their settlement in three hours from here. We’re in a clearing surrounded by trees right now—ideal for setting up camp without letting any light leak out. The enemy will likely not find us here.”

So that’s why they made a fire. I was concerned, since we’re

close to the enemy base and the fire is really visible—but now I get it.

“Which brings me to my question. I’d like you two to choose whether to wait here or to head to the battlefield with us. If you stay here, you could be set upon by frog fiend stragglers or other monsters. We’ll leave your escort with you, but I can’t say for sure you’ll be safe.”

Going with them to the frog fiends’ home would definitely involve us in the battle, but having thirty hunters with us is arguably more of a relief. The group consisted of many veterans, too, and I have advance information that even if things go really wrong, they’ll still win.

To be honest, I don’t know how strong other monsters are, so I can’t decide which is the right choice.

“Hmm, well...I am still a hunter, so I could head to the battlefield. But I’m sure Boxxo doesn’t want to be wrapped up in the fighting.”

That’s troubling. How do I answer? I can’t feel pain, and I know from experience that I can shrug off a few hits. Even if I get hurt, I can restore myself with points.

I don’t particularly mind, but it depends on what Lammi wants to do. From the looks of her, she’s not scared—in fact, she looks like she’s raring to go. That makes my answer easy.

“Too bad.”

“Wait, you want to be in the battle?”

“Welcome.”

“Okay, got it. Director, we’ll be taking part, too!”

I’ll protect her for sure. I don’t have arms or legs, but I have my Force Field, so I should be able to defend her. She was my first customer when I came to this world, and my first friend. I’ll use as many points as I need if it means I can help her. I’ll have to do my best to sell as much as I can.

Come, ye hunters, and become thralls to my products!



As the sun begins to rise, the hunters stir as well. Lammi ended up sleeping against me. My Heat-Retention function seems to affect my surroundings, and surprisingly, she slept soundly with nary a shiver all through the night.

It's cooled down quite a bit since yesterday, and now the oden and the warm beverages are selling like hotcakes. Making one thousand points in a single day is stunning in a good way.

This morning, once again, there's a line in front of me for the warm items. I should probably increase the number of cup ramen and corn soup I have on hand.

As for slaying the frog fiends, I feel as though we could wait a bit, until they go into hibernation. Even after taking the notable differences into consideration, as long as they share that key property with the frogs from my world, waiting would make the raid a lot easier. Well, even if my guess is correct, I have no way of communicating that.

"Listen up, everyone. Now that we've finished breakfast, we're going to attack the enemy's headquarters. Do everything as we planned. In terms of combat power, we should achieve total victory. But do not let your guards down. That is all."

I feel an odd persuasiveness and sense of relief from the director's words. They seem to assure that everything will be all right.

It looks like the tents and cooking utensils are all cleaned up. Lammis hoists me onto her back as always, and we set off.

Traveling with allies to fight monsters. Thinking of it this way makes it sound like a commonplace otherworld fantasy story, but I'm a vending machine, so...I can't move by myself... It can't be helped.

Acquiring another Blessing aside from Force Field to gain abilities seems like the fastest route to actually doing something on my own, but even the least expensive of those Blessing abilities I can get cost one million points!

Ah, the skies are clear and blue. Existing only as something that gets carried around by a cute girl makes me, as a man, start to wonder about things, but I'll get depressed if I think about that, so I won't.

Raid

We've apparently gotten fairly close to where the frog people live, and I can feel the air around us shifting. Even though I'm a machine!

Water droplets are sticking to my body. It seems terribly humid. I wonder if I'll start rusting...

The ground under us seems to be dirt and mud, making it hard to walk. Lammis is buried up to her knees because I'm too heavy. I wonder if she's all right.

"Gugegugagwegwe!"

"Get theeeeem!"

Valiant shouts and the frog people's cries are going up all over. The leading hunters must have gone into battle. I would think they'd be at a disadvantage because of the bad footing, but I'm sure they're already aware of the situation.

They foresaw victory despite that, so it's presumptuous for an amateur like me to worry. I can only pray for my customers' safety.

I think I hear the sounds of feet splashing through mud getting closer. The faces of the escorts taking up positions surrounding the boar cart have become serious.

"Boxxo, I think the enemy's here. Let's do our best."

Lammis knows I'm no use to her in battle, but she said *our* best. As a man, I have to rise to that kind of expectation. Though I don't think vending machines have genders.

She seems to want to fight without putting me down first. Since carrying all this weight doesn't bother her in the slightest, she should be fine in theory, but if she's made the decision already, then I have only one answer to give her.

"Welcome," I reply, keeping the volume as low as possible. You focus on what's in front of you, and I'll watch your back. I can stop any attack they throw at me.

Oh, and there's the enemy. A decent number of frog people are running at us, I think—I'm on Lammis's back, so I'm facing the other way, and I can only judge by sound. Wait, one just appeared from the side that I can actually see. Its webbed feet must allow it to skim across the mud without sinking into it.

Lammis turns and readies herself for the enemy approaching from the side, so now I can see the ones standing in our way in my peripheral vision.

"We get a bonus depending on how many we kill, so put your backs into it! Attack!"

"Let's do this!"

Following the leader Kerioyl's command, arrows, throwing knives, and hand axes begin flying at the frog people approaching from ahead.

Wow, these folks seem fairly skilled. Almost all of them land their shots, nailing the frog people. Half of their targets are already down; the enemy can't even get close.

"Water, form vortex and pierce!"

That must be the lady in magicians' clothes who called Kerioyl "Captain." She thrusts her staff out, and as if thrown forward from the momentum, water blasts straight out like a hose.

The stream, ignoring gravity, flies parallel to the ground. On closer examination, the leading tip is sharpened like a drill. Despite being made of water, the stream shoots straight through a frog person's head and skewers a second one behind it.

That must be magic, huh? I wonder if I could use it like that if I'd gotten it as my Blessing. That would make me a fighting vending machine... Not a terrible future. But wait, my magic stat is zero. Yeah, don't think that'll work.

My carefree train of thought underlines how easily we're winning. My vision is shaking hard, probably because Lammis was fighting, but it's really inconvenient not to be able to see behind me. She might as well have carried me facing the same direction.

She was always grumbling about not being able to land her attacks much, likely due to her low dexterity. Is she doing better now?

I'm worried, but I'm not hearing anything bad, and none of the escorts looking our way are panicked or running to our aid, so Lammis must not be in a bad position.

Hmm, I just realized this. She didn't bring a weapon with her.

She has rather large gloves on her hands, but could they be for...?

“All right! I managed to get him. Boxxo, I was trying to move as little as possible so I wouldn’t shake you, and my attacks are hitting more. It’s a cinch!”

I hear Lammis’s gleeful voice behind me. She turns around halfway and sets herself up to take on a new enemy. Since my field of vision has moved, I get my wish—I can now see the enemy she was fighting before.

Oh, wow. Never seen a dent that big in a face before. The frog person’s corpse is lying atop the mud. Its face is so misshapen you’d think it was bashed in by a giant hammer. That must be what happens when you get punched by her Might. I...I see. If you really think about it, it’s not that surprising.

She carries me around easily, and she has the endurance and leg strength to keep at it without so much as a grimace. It makes perfect sense that she could deliver blows with that much force.

As mentioned earlier, I’m currently on her back. That’s forcing her to act with subtlety and refrain from making any unnecessary movements, which is doing wonders for her efficiency. Combining her raw strength with calculated movements and precise strikes makes her a force to be reckoned with.

I’m pleased beyond words that I’m indirectly helping Lammis like this.

It looked like we’d be able to finish off the frog people in a bit, but ten more have shown up as reinforcements. They said we wouldn’t see much fighting, since we’re at the rear. Isn’t this strange?

“It’s not natural for so many of them to be here. If the front lines are seeing even more of them, then... This is getting suspicious.”

I hear Captain Kerioyl muttering, his voice uneasy. The situation really is abnormal.

“Everyone, form up. Get too far out and they’ll cut your legs out from under you!”

“Yes, Captain!”

The hunters in our escort make a circle formation around the boar cart. It’s the right choice, since even more frog people pop out of the mud to surround us.

By just a quick estimate, I see thirty of them. Will each of us have to take on five? Isn’t that pretty bad?

“Captain, I think this is a little much!”

“Save your whining. We’ll abandon the buar cart if we need to. That’s our motto—life comes first!”

“I’ve never heard that before.”

Kerioyl and the blue-haired Filmina are making small talk, but their faces are entirely deadpan. Does that go to show how tense the situation is?

If Lammis is really in danger, I’d want her to run away. And to leave me behind if she needs to.

But she goes up and stands next to a hunter wielding a bow. Does she plan on full-out close-quarters combat?

“I’ll do something about the ones that get through.”

“Thanks, that’s a big help!”

I can’t see the person, since they’re wearing a hood, but this ranger-like hunter must be a girl. Wait, I only just realized how many female hunters there are in our escort. They were all calling Kerioyl their captain, which means they all work for him.

Of the six, three are female. Is their team a harem, or...? I’m going to call Kerioyl “Stubble” from now on.

Meanwhile, as I think about dumb stuff, the situation is getting worse. They don’t call Stubble their captain for nothing. He handles his two short swords with amazing skill, quickly building a pile of frog corpses.

Filmina is skillfully using her water to prevent enemies from approaching. The others, too, all seem fairly adept, forcing the frog people back.

The issue is the archer Lammis is covering. She’s pretty proficient in her own right, but it doesn’t seem like she’s skilled at loosing arrows rapidly. She takes her time between shots, and several of the enemies have gotten through.

Lammis steps in to cover her, and she’s managing to deal with the frog people now. She seems to have figured out their movements from before, and one-on-one, she should easily crush them. But taking on two at once seems difficult for her.

Another one comes around behind her, sticks out its long tongue, and licks its own eyeballs. Is it provoking her? Now in her blind spot, it raises an ax, then tries to hit me with it.

I can withstand the damage without doing anything, so I purposely take the strike without putting up my Force Field.

[4 damage. Durability decreased by 4.]

With the body-rattling impact, letters appear. It's the damage display I haven't seen in a while.

Axes seem to have high power, but I have plenty of points left. I'll take another dozen, please.

"Wait, one got behind me?! S-sorry, Boxxo! Are you okay?!"

I hear a flustered voice. You don't have to panic like that, you know. No need to worry. I'm actually happy I took the hit in your place.

"Welcome."

"I'm really, really sorry!"

"Stop worrying and focus on what's in front of you" is what I want to say. Annoyingly, I can't. My efforts will have been for nothing if she gets distracted by me and loses focus on the battle.

I can't see what's happening over there, but I feel through the shaking that she's upset. She's so impatient I can feel it. This isn't going in a good direction.

"Eek!"

The archer seems to have failed to dodge an attack; I see her fall, out of the corner of my vision. A frog holding a spear jumps above her, aiming to impale her.

"Noooooo!"

When Lammis sees this, she jumps in without thinking. She gets on top of her to protect her, and...well, I'm perfectly in between them now.

Ack, that spear with the frog's weight behind it is closing in. Time to activate my Force Field!

A pale-blue light spreads out around me, repelling the spear's tip a hair away from my body, and sends the frog person flying as well.

"Wait, what was that light...? Was that you?"

"N-no!"

The archer shakes her head, confirming her response. I can just barely see it out of the corner of my vision. Ah, this is a pain in the butt. Why can't I see farther? Shouldn't there be a function that'll let me do that?

It's so inconvenient that despite the situation, I skim the list of functions. There it is—Omnidirectional Vision. A thousand points isn't cheap, but beggars can't be choosers. I acquire it without hesitation.

Ohhh, my vision is suddenly expanding... I feel sick. I'm happy

that I can see in every direction, but it's going to be tough-going until I get used to this.

"Then who made this wall of light?"

"Get one free with a winner."

I try to imply that it was me. I don't want to brag, but they'll have trouble moving if they don't know who did it.

"Wait, Boxxo, you're doing this?!"

"Welcome."

"Wow. Okay. Thanks, Boxxo!"

Believing me so readily is one of Lammi's good traits. A metal box that can have an ability like this, and communicate its intent, is an absurd idea. Normally, no one would believe me.

"Then will you do that for us if we're in danger?"

"Welcome."

I turn up the volume and give a clear answer. Now she knows I have the ability to protect her.

This is where the hard part starts. Let's work together to wipe out the frogs.

The Machine and the Girl

“Boxxo, if they come from behind, let me know.”

“Welcome. Get one free with a winner.”

“So if you say ‘Get one free with a winner,’ that means an enemy is here, right?”

“Welcome.”

I feel like our communication is smoothing out. A big part of it is how sharp Lammis is, but I’m starting to feel like we’re understanding each other even without talking.

I still can’t believe she’s really a dropout. I’ve been watching each of her punches and kicks in detail now that I can see her move, and despite not being able to pull her elbow back very far since I’m in the way on her back, she hasn’t bumped my vending machine body with it once.

Her foot movements are slow and shuffling, but when she evades enemy attacks, she does so with the least movement possible while getting in as close as she can.

Despite her cramped motions, I haven’t been hit a single time. I don’t know much about martial arts, but she’s got a warrior’s edge to her techniques and foot movements.

“Ah, this is it. Yeah, this is how I’m supposed to move! All those days Master made me train with a rock on my back! I’ve been through hell, but it’s finally paying off!”



Master? Did Lammis get pretty strong after harsh combat training but she just couldn't bring out her full potential? Is carrying me jogging her memory of similar training experiences, which helped her move with the extra weight? That interpretation seems too convenient to be true.

In any case, seeing her like this puts my mind at ease. But I don't get how this is set up so that she's stronger while carrying a vending machine. The usual way of things is to wear weights all the time, then take them off to give yourself a boost in abilities.

"Whoa, that's some nice stuff. That brute force and the way you slip past attacks—both amazing."

"Oh, come on, you're making me blush!"

Please leave getting embarrassed over Captain Stubble's praise for later. I know you're happy because you're not used to compliments, but we're in the middle of a battlefield. You can feel pleased with yourself later! Later! Please just focus on the battle—I'm getting worried just watching!

And there—an enemy's coming.

"Get one free with a winner."

"Not you, too, Boxxo. You're all too much."

What was that communication before even for? You forgot all about the conversation we just had. Ah, whatever. Force Field!

I stop two frog people coming up behind me right before they touch me. That was close... Got away by the skin of my metaphorical teeth.

"What's with this blue light? It's blocking their attack *and* not letting them through? I've never heard of or seen anything like it... Is this your Blessing?"

Is Force Field a rarity? Captain Stubble is mumbling to himself, poking the field with his fingers and weapons. You too—you're in combat, but you're so relaxed. Oh, a frog person jumped up behind him, and he cut it down without even turning around. He's no weakling.

"Nope. This is Boxxo's power."

Ack, Lammis. I'd have rather you kept it a secret from him, but whatever. Her innocence and never doubting anyone are part of her charm.

A grin appears on Stubble's lips. Now there's a scheming face.

He might actually steal me. He just reached the top of my “suspicious persons” list.

“I’d love to get to know Boxxo better.”

“Yup, you two get along now!”

If not for the wretched frog corpses lying about, this would seem like a panel out of a slice-of-life comic. Also, I’ll pass on making friends with Stubble, thanks.

And let’s leave the pleasantries for later, shall we? This isn’t the time nor the place to be entertaining ourselves with conversation—or so I thought, but we’re surprisingly not having a tough time. Our escort team seems fairly accomplished at their job, and they’re taking care of the frogs without any issues.

“Looks like we got most of them. I want the rest of you cutting off their tongues, yeah? We’ll turn them in to the association later.”

“Captain, can’t you help us out? These are very slimy and disgusting.”

“Heh. I’m the captain here—and it’s because I don’t want to do any of that annoying stuff.”

“You’re a tyrant!”

“He’s into little girls!”

“I don’t get paid enough for this!”

“You’ve all got a lot of balls, you know that?”

Strangely enough, they seem at home on the battlefield. With the abuse they’re lobbing at one another, all I can see it as is horseplay. I’m starting to think this Captain Stubble might simply be sharp-sighted, and not necessarily a bad guy.

However, even if someone’s own group makes an idol of him, he could still be a brute to others. I can’t let my guard down.

“Anyway, what now? Our earnings ain’t bad, but if we want to be greedy, we can head to the front lines.”

“You are aware that our mission is to protect the food transport and the metal box, plus the girl carrying it.”

“Yeah, yeah, I got it. But listen, Vice Captain Filmina—we earn some more here, and it’ll be quite a bit easier to keep this group of ours running. I might’ve even given you all a nice bonus, but I guess that’s too bad. Really just unfortunate.”

Captain Stubble theatrically puts a hand to his forehead and shakes his head. Filmina is the vice captain? She must have her hands full being bossed around by this free spirit.

“Fine. I understand. We have been wanting to get new equipment, too, so let’s head to the front lines to help. But only if you convince Lady Lammis. Our mission is still to guard her and Boxxo.”

“Yeah, I know, I know! Keep worrying about little things like that and you’re going to get crow’s-feet. Take it a little easier, yeah?”

Wow. Captain Stubble over here is giving a thumbs-up and a wink, and Vice Captain Filmina is mad. I give you permission to punch him.

“In any case, what would you like to do, Lady Lammis? We’ll wait here if you wish, of course.”

“Let’s go! Let’s fight! I know you want to fight more!”

Ugh, shut up. You’re a grown adult whining like a little kid. His wiggling motions seem to strike a nerve with Filmina, and she rams a jet of water into him.

“Um, I’d want to help them if they’re having a hard time, so let’s go! Boxxo, what about you?”

I figured Lammis would say that. No argument here, of course.

“Welcome.”

If the enemy made its way to us, then the front line could be having a lot of problems. I’m not about to moan and groan about going to reinforce them, but...well, I can’t do that even if I wanted to. It’s likely we’ll end up in a chaotic fight. I’d better pay close attention so I can activate Force Field right away if the need arises.

After advancing with the boar cart, we came across scattered skirmishes in the mud.

Stubble’s team gives a rallying cry and attacks the frog people. It seems like the other hunters were on the back foot, so they’re clearly happy for the intervention.

Still, the difference in numbers is severe. Our earlier estimates put their numbers around fifty at most, but looking at it now, there’s no fewer than a hundred frog people. And if you add the corpses on the ground, the total comes close to two hundred!

A significant number of our hunters have been injured as well. A person in a white robe is releasing white light from his hands and healing the wounded. It’s as though he’s turning back time—their serious wounds close up fast enough for me to see it happen.

Even I know that one. The Blessing of Healing Light, was it? A

fair number of people possess this Blessing, but the ability to heal wounds is incredibly valuable, and those who have it are in high demand. As a side note, the woman in the older couple who comes to me all the time can use it.

Almost thirty hunters are around here, and it looks like about half of them are in no condition to fight. Healing their wounds won't return their stamina or the blood they lost, so the more severely wounded hunters won't be rejoining the battle anytime soon.

"We have to carry the wounded to the cart!"

Instead of taking part in the fighting, Lammis wants to secure the wounded, huh? The injured open their eyes wide in confusion at her running to them with me on her back, but they don't complain as she carries them to the cart.

And she lifts full-grown adults with ease—despite my considerable weight already on her back. But if her physical strength is that high anyway, it wouldn't make sense if she wasn't strong enough for this.

Times like these trouble me, since I can't help with anything. Isn't there something I can do? Maybe I'll give the wounded sports drinks as gifts. Right after she brings another person to the cart, I drop a sports drink into my compartment and say, "Get one free with a winner." She seems to figure it out from that.

"I can give this to the wounded, right?"

"Welcome."

I drop one drink after another as Lammis picks them up and lines them up on the cart. Twenty should be enough.

"It's on Boxxo, so drink as much as you like."

"Right...Thanks..."

When the mud-caked hunters see her worrying about them from the bottom of her heart, weak smiles appear on their stern faces. Being cared for by the pure and innocent Lammis would stir the heart of any man.

When she finishes placing the injured into the cart, only 20 percent of all those frog people are left. The ones who are making it through this chaotic fight with light wounds—or with no wounds at all—seem like the veterans, easily sending the frog people to their graves.

Doesn't the overwhelming difference in ability seem a little unfair?

“Thank you, Kerioyl. You’ve done the Menagerie of Fools proud today.”

Director Bear lumbers over to us. The blood staining his claws really enhances his menacing features. Does he fight empty-handed, too? Or maybe I should call it bare-handed fighting...though his sharp claws alone look like they can rival blades.

Anyway, that’s a weird name for a group.

“We had time, sir. I wasn’t sure if it was necessary, though.”

“No, I’m grateful for your assistance. There were more than we expected, but thanks to you, we slayed them. Still, was there more than one settlement’s worth of frog fiends? They were easily double our estimate for what one settlement can produce.”

“They were very willing to fight, too, sir—almost strangely so. Normally, they don’t attack with the intent of wiping us all out.”

That was Vice Captain Filmina interrupting the conversation between Captain Stubble and Director Bear.

She’s right. When the frog people attacked me, they withdrew once they realized it wasn’t working, and they didn’t come after me again. I can agree that they’re not the kind of creature to recklessly assault you over and over.

“Hmm. There’s only one thing that could have caused this...”

“Yes, I can think of nothing else...”

“That’s what it would mean.”

All three of them are grimacing. Judging by the way they’re speaking, maybe the situation is giving them a bad premonition. I wish they’d come out and say it instead of leaving it up to the rest of us to read between the lines. I can’t exactly ask them about it myself.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Nice one, Lammis! That’s what I wanted to ask.

“Ah, sorry. This is strictly speculation, but there’s a good chance we’re dealing with a king frog fiend.”

A...king frog fiend? What’s that? Seems strong from the name alone. I have a bad feeling about this.

Altercation

Leaving the out-of-commission wounded to rest in the cart and assigning them an escort, only the strongest move ahead to defeat the king of the frogs—the king frog fiend.

In a normal story, this is where the protagonist would be chosen as one of those members, but Lammis and I, the vending machine, are staying behind.

Of course, providing things to eat and drink is the whole point I'm here, so that's only natural.

The six people assigned as our escorts are the so-called Menagerie of Fools, led by Kerioyl. If I had eyebrows I would be furrowing them right now over their naming sense, but all six of them had gone to slay the king.

The frog base—their settlement—should hold only the king and its henchmen, so we can wait here at ease. Which means it's time to do business! I've been placed near the cart, so let's rack up a few more points.

"Welcome. Welcome."

"We have an assortment of warm food and beverages! Drinks are one silver coin apiece!"

Lammis helps me out in response to my calls.

It looks like perfect timing, as the hunters are just catching their breath. The cup ramen, tea, and sports drink sales begin to shoot through the roof.

At first, not many in the settlement liked the sports drinks, since they'd never experienced the flavors before. But when the hunters downed them after a workday had tired them out, it alleviated their exhaustion. Word got out, and now they're hugely popular with hunters.

I've heard that this famous sports drink, with its blue-and-white logo, was developed in the first place for medicinal purposes. It's

excellent at rehydrating you, and I recall a few times when I had a cold or diarrhea and it helped immensely.

It's the perfect beverage for the situation.

"Shoot. Getting to eat something warm without having to start a fire? Count me in."

"And we don't have to clean up, either, which is great."

"I want one of these for our team, too."

A vending machine's capabilities seem quite convenient for the hunters, and a lot of people are glancing enviously this way. Captain Stubble was enough of a nuisance—do I have to start being cautious around the other hunters now, too?

Lammis seems happy I'm so popular. She's smiling even wider than usual. I...can't imagine she realizes the intent behind those stares, though.

"Sorry, could someone help me patch this guy up?"

"Oh, I'll do it! Boxxo, you'll be alone for a few minutes. But don't cry if you get lonely, okay?"

"Please come again."

"What's that supposed to mean? I'll be right back!"

She was teasing with her question, so I quickly returned the favor. She puffs out a cheek and pretends to be a little sulky, then runs off.

If I were a human, it might look like we're a couple. But I'm an inanimate object, so...

"Oh, the softy is gone. Now's my chance."

A short, gangly man with marked buckteeth glances around and walks over. I know it's a terrible offense to judge a book by its cover, but allow me this—he's a sketchy dude.

He looks somehow like a stereotypical grunt, like basic cannon fodder. I instinctively want to call him a low-life thug. He's whistling as he approaches, but his eyes are inspecting me up and down.

I follow his gaze—he seems to be looking at the coin slot.

"Let's see. What to buy?" says the grunt-looking hunter in a purposely loud voice as he tries to stick a thin wirelike object into the coin slot.

Oh, so he wants to steal the money. I'll have to respond in kind.

"Welcome," I say at maximum volume.

"Hweh?!"

Oh, he becomes so scared he jumps. Thanks to my volume and

his cry of surprise, several people are watching us. What will you do now?

“H-huh, it really can talk, eh? Pretty cool.”

He’s pretending to be impressed, but his smile is a shaky one.

If he buys something and leaves, I’ll leave him alone, but he doesn’t look that honest.

“Bastard. If you know what I’m saying, then just give up the money...unless you want someone to break you.”

So it’s come to whispered threats. Oh, he’s jabbing me with his toes. Interesting. He’s underestimating me because, as a vending machine, I have no arms or legs.

Why don’t I show him the true strength of a vending machine that can defend itself?

I drop a bottle of mineral water into my compartment and see joy light up the man’s face. Then, as he reaches in and fishes around for it...I drop another item in.

“Another sound— Ack, that’s hot, hot, hot! Hot— *Gyahhhhhh!*”

Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha. How do you like my burning-hot corn soup, heated to the maximum temperature? Why don’t I add some fuel to the fire?

“Get one free with a winner.”

After dropping several more cans of corn soup in, the man’s hand gets stuck inside. I will not allow you to harm my body and steal my money. I’ll let you suffer for a while.

“Damn, damn you, shitty box! I’ll smash you to pieces!”

The man pulls a short sword from his waist and swings wildly. I could repel it with my Force Field, but I won’t take much damage if it hits me. I’ll take the hit on purpose to let everyone know how foolish this act is.

After making my decision, I stare at the blade’s tip as it approaches, but right before it touches me, it stops right in its tracks.

“What are you trying to do to Boxxo...?”

Was that low, intimidating voice Lammi’s? She must have run over after hearing the noise. I didn’t know she could sound like that.

Feeling something grab at his wrist, the man turns around and freezes. That’s how fearsome Lammi’s expression is. Her ordinarily cute face now bears wide, scornful eyes, reflecting the frightening extent of her wrath.

“N-nothing! I was trying to get the item, and then it dropped so many on my arm that I can’t get it out!”

“But you did something weird to him first, didn’t you?”

Once again, Lammis shows how sharp and quick-witted she is. I think I’m in love.

“No! This thing just started acting up on me!”

“Boxxo, did he really not do anything strange?”

“Too bad.”

“See? Boxxo says you’re lying.”

“What? You’re gonna believe a metal box over me—?”

“Of course I am,” interrupts Lammis immediately. She has such incredible faith in me. I almost want to give her a hug. If only I had arms.

What I do have is one more canned present for the liar. It’s cool in temperature, but its weight will crush his hand.

“Ow, owwww, that hurts! Stupid box! Stop it!”

“Come to think of it, are you the one the captain told me to be wary of? Are you Gugoye?”

“What? N-no, I’m not.”

Wow, he’s clearly suspicious. And a terrible actor to boot. He’s blatantly looking away, and there’s a bead of sweat dripping from his temple. He’s basically saying yes.

“Lammis, that’d be Gugoye. Famous for his sticky fingers,” says an older man with a scraggly beard, sticking his head out of the cart. Oh, he’s the one who explained to his subordinates how to use the vending machine. I’ll mentally jot him down on my “good person” list.

“Hmmmm. I don’t need to go easy on him, then, right?”

Lammis cracks her fingers, and despite looking down on the man with a smile, she looks somewhat terrifying.

The rest of the hunters end up tying up the man with straw rope and throwing him into the cart with the wounded. Things go smoothly, because apparently he has a criminal record of stealing money from hunters, and everyone neatly sided with Lammis.

Time passes idly after that. The ones who headed for the base are probably fighting right now. I don’t know how strong a king frog fiend is, but that also doesn’t give me any reason to worry. If I could talk, I could be seeking out information right now, but I can only listen, so I don’t have anything else to do.

“There were more of them than we thought, but we’ll get extra

rewards for it.”

“I can’t wait to get back to the settlement and have a drink.”

The group waiting here is certain of our victory. Everyone is relaxing. In the cart are nine injured, and six are guarding them. Battles are unpredictable by nature, so it seems to me they’re not being cautious enough. Still, I can’t do any fighting, so I don’t have the right to complain. And I can’t talk that freely anyway.

I should earn enough points to add alcohol as a new product when we return to the settlement. *Shochu* and tonic, sake, and cocktails are all options. Which one would the people in this world like?

Come to think of it, would they be able to drink something carbonated if I provided it? Some kids get sore throats the first time they have a carbonated drink, after all. Well, they seem fine once they get used to it, so maybe I can stock some.

I had Lammis test it once before, but she couldn’t grasp how to open the pull tab. She fiddled around with it for a bit—shaking the can up—and as soon as she got it open, it sprayed all over her. Ever since then, Lammis has been afraid of carbonated drinks, so I haven’t offered any. Maybe it would be all right to permit it for someone else. And only as long as it’s low on the carbonation.

“It looks like this will end safely, huh, Boxxo? I’ll make you nice and clean when we get back, so hang in there just a little longer.”

“Welcome.”

I’m looking forward to that. It’s not as though I have a sense of touch, but I do sort of like getting wiped down with a moist cloth. It somehow refreshes my body and mind, and it feels good.

I was worried when I heard we’d be participating in the fighting, but it looks like we’ll be able to get home without any deaths among the hunters. I’m in a good mood, so maybe I’ll have a celebration sale when we get back to the settlement.

“Th-that’s not good! Hey, everyone, get out of here! That huge thing is coming straight this way!”

A man in the cart, his chest wrapped in bandages, is shouting and pointing into the distance.

Prompted by how desperate he sounds, I look over—and see a giant frog covered in flames hopping toward us.

The King Frog Fiend

“What is this? Why is the king frog fiend coming this way?! What are the other guys doing?! Weren’t they supposed to kill it?!”

Ignoring the angry shouts flying between the hunters, I focus on the giant frog.

Several hunters are in pursuit a short distance behind it. Judging by their sizes, the frog is probably around ten feet tall. It could reach the second story of an apartment building.

Unlike the frog people, this one is mostly frog. It isn’t walking on two legs—its limbs are the same as a frog’s. It’s wearing dirt-colored armor on its body, though, so it doesn’t look like an ordinary frog.

Well, anyway, more importantly, how do those flames all over it work? I think for a moment that a hunter must have set it on fire, but the frog seems fine with it. Are those fires the monster’s doing?

“Crap, it’s raging, too! We can’t get close to it!”

Oh, so I suppose those flames are on purpose. I can guess that it’s something akin to a Blessing. Man, first my Force Field, now this—is there anything Blessings can’t do?

Every time it hops, I feel a tremor throughout my machine body. It may be only ten feet tall, but it must be pretty damn heavy. Come to think of it, I’ve heard that if you grab a frog’s muscles, you can feel how hard they actually are.

I’m calmly thinking over things, but...isn’t this, like, seriously bad?

“Retreat! Everyone, retreat!”

“Ruuuuuun! Leave your stuff and go!”

Everyone immediately begins to withdraw. At first, I assume it’s going to become a chaotic, messy affair, but everyone is moving skillfully. In just a few seconds, most of the hunters have fled.

“What? Um, huh?”

Lammis is simply glancing around her, unsure of what to do. I know she isn't good at making snap decisions, but hitting the WARM button over and over isn't going to do anything! Calm down, calm down!

"Too bad. Too bad."

"What? Y-yeah, you're right. I have to calm down. Boxxo, we should run away, too!"

She finally snaps out of it. After lifting me onto her back and stepping out to run, she stops. I consider urging her on, but when I see where she's looking, I realize why she's still here.

"Damn, the buar won't move! Did that thing scare it? Move it! Please move!"

I know the boar with the horn is called a buar—did it freeze up after seeing that giant frog? A deer in the headlights is one thing—but a buar scared of a frog is just silly.

If the cart carrying the wounded won't move, then they'll have to walk unaided. Their wounds are closed, but they've already lost a lot of blood and stamina. There's probably zero chance of them being able to run and flee.

But there's no time to hesitate when it comes to keeping Lammis safe. Her life is the most important thing right now. It will mean abandoning them, but leaving others behind in an emergency isn't a sin. So—

"I have to help them! If the buar can't move, then I'll pull the cart!"

I figured she'd say that. She saved me because she's like that. If it comes down to it, I'll make the strongest Force Field I can, so do what you want. Even if I can't save anyone else, I'll save her no matter what.

She runs over to the buar cart, gently strokes the frightened buar's back, then undoes its restraints. Suddenly, as though snapping out of a trance, the animal stampedes away.

"Wh-why, you! The buar ran away! Are you telling us to die —?"

"No! I'll pull you instead!" shouts Lammis, interrupting the wounded person before grasping the cart's handle with both hands. Then she clenches her teeth and takes a step forward.

Normally, one girl wouldn't be enough to pull a cart with nine whole adults in it. But she has incredible Might, enough to carry me, a vending machine, on her back with ease. This result isn't

surprising to me, since I know that already. But...

“Hurrrghhh!”

It’s slowing. Her feet are caught in the quagmire on the ground, and the wheels sink heavily in it. Just being able to move it, albeit slowly, is a masterly feat, but it doesn’t count for much in this situation.

The king frog fiend approaching from behind has gotten fairly close. At this rate, it’s only a matter of time before it either tramples us or laps us up into its giant mouth. Or possibly burns us to death.

If I could talk, I could tell her to put down the vending machine she’s carrying...but even if I could, I bet she’d refuse.

What now? What should we do? Is the only option to endure its attacks with Force Field? I could maybe save Lammis with that, but not the wounded.

If none of the competent folks can finish it off, finishing it off with only wounded people is impossible. The hunters that stayed behind as our escort ran away first thing, too.

Is there no way to stop it?

All we have to do is startle it or get in its way. If we can buy some time, the hunters chasing from behind should manage to get the job done. Isn’t there an item I can use right now?!

I skim through my product listing, but the tremors and cries of the wounded are steadily intensifying, making me impatient. Ah, dammit, something—anything!

A beneficial item or product in the lineup of items I’ve bought before now... Wait a second. Oh, if we use this and that, we might be able to stall the frog!

How many points do I have? Over six thousand? I can afford it!

First, I need a new function and a change. Until now, half-liter plastic bottles were the biggest I could stock, but I’m spending a thousand points to make it so that I can stock two-liter bottles as well.

And now I’ll buy new items. I line an entire shelf with two-liter bottles of cola, a carbonated drink. It’s the kind with *diet* before the name, which I haven’t seen recently. I don’t need any other items right now.

I’m on Lammis’s back, so she won’t notice if I change products. For now, I’ll give her one!

“Whoa, what was that?! Did it catch us?”

“No, Lammis, it was that thing on your back—Boxxo? It looks a

little different, and something came out on its own.”

Nice assist, beard guy. Lammi, please figure it out now.

“B-but why? Why give an item for free now? Boxxo, did you do that on purpose?”

“Welcome.”

“You have a plan, huh? I’ll trust you!”

Lammi releases the cart. Without hesitating, she puts me on the ground, then takes out the two-liter plastic bottle.

“Wait, it’s all bubbly... Is it that strange juice?”

She seems to remember what happened, and she’s frowning because of it, but it’s fine as long as she understands. Time for a big treat.

I drop one bottle after another into my compartment. Lammi takes them out as they come and busies herself lining them up on the cart.

Come to think of it, it’s not shaking anymore. Did something happen?

I glance toward the king frog fiend and see that the hunters have managed to catch up to attack it. But they seem like they’re in a bad spot, and they don’t have a good way to deal with those flames.

At this rate, either way, it’ll definitely arrive here very soon. That doesn’t change the fact that we need to do something.

I buy a second additional function—and now it’s time for a form change!

Light wraps around me as I begin a swift change to something different. The edges on my rectangular body disappear, replaced by a pillar-like shape.

Vivid colors splash across my lower half in a polka-dot pattern. Above that is a transparent body, which provides a clear view of my contents. It’s filled to the brim with my latest product: colorful candies wrapped in cylindrical paper packaging.

The candies are shaped similarly to stones used in Go, and there are several in one roll. They’re delicious—if you eat them like you’re supposed to.

“What? Huh? Boxxo’s gotten round and soft!”

Hey, if you say it that way, people are going to think I had a mean personality before. Wait, I don’t have time to be thinking about that. You’re about to get this candy for free, too.

“Um—oh! I should take these, too, right?”

“Welcome.”

Lammis picks up everything overflowing from my compartment. Things are going smoothly—the problem comes now. How am I going to make her...understand?

How can I convey my plan? I suppose I can only make use of what I have.

“Insert coins. Insert coins. Insert coins.”

“Huh? You gave me so many items, but you want coins now?”

“Too bad. Insert coins. Insert coins.”

“Wh-what?”

I suppose that’s nowhere near enough information. But I don’t have any other way of doing this. I know it’s absurd. But please, somehow...

“Lammis, that thing’s broken.”

“No he isn’t! Boxxo is trying really hard to tell me something!”

I feel like I could cry. She trusts me, and she’s trying to figure this out. Even if I don’t get my point across, I’ll have no regrets. Just the fact that Lammis is here now, believing in me, is enough.

“This carbonated drink. Candy. Insert coins. But not... This drink exploded on me before, right? Hmm, so if I do that again... But what’s this candy for? They came out without me putting in money, but I have to put in coins, or maybe not...”

One more step. Just one more step. Please figure it out.

“Does it matter? Get these ropes off me! I’m not dying here with the lot of you!”

That noisy guy must be the lowlife they wrapped in straw rope. I’d forgotten he exists.

“Oh, shut up already! Someone put something in his mouth and make him quiet down!”

“G-got it. What about this?”

Oh. The bearded man yelled at a wounded person, who threw an entire roll of candy into the guy’s mouth.

“Whafs fsh pshd be?! *Pftooey!* Did you just shove a roll of paper in my mouth? Some of it got inside— Wait, what is this? It’s insanely good! But it’s drying my throat out. Someone give me water! Water, now!”

When he spat it out, the paper wrapping must have torn, and a piece of candy dropped inside his mouth. How dare he enjoy the flavors when we’re on the precipice of death?

“Gah, shut up. Drink this, I don’t care!”

The bearded man tosses a cola over to the wounded man, who opens the top and makes the lowlife drink it— Ah.

“Bffhahhhhhh!”

Liquid erupts from his mouth. Lammis sees this and figures everything out.

“You didn’t mean ‘put coins in’—you meant...‘put these candies in’!”

“Welcome.”

That’s correct, Lammis. She tears open the paper wrapping and pours the entire roll of candy into the cola. It spurts out everywhere, getting the hunters soaking wet.

“Wh-what? That thing exploded!”

“What’s this sweet flavor...? Ack, it stings my eyes!”

Yes! This is the phenomenon that gained instant fame on video websites. If you put a certain kind of candy in cola, all the liquid bursts out like a geyser. Salt and Ramune would have worked as well, but this combination has the most force behind it. Also, this variety of cola reacts to it the best. The eruption spans three or four yards...or so those experienced with this will attest.

Now that she knows what they need to do, Lammis passes out cola and candy to all the wounded people and gives them a quick explanation. I see everyone has gotten some. We’ve got nothing to lose—let’s splash ‘em!

Out of the Frying Pan

The fierce fighting continues, the combat drawing slowly closer. Does the frog king want to eat weakened, immobilized hunters? They do say carnivores prey on the weakest in a group.

A fair bit of distance still divides us, but the heat must be reaching us, since Lammis and the hunters are scowling.

The hunters currently fighting appear to have noticed us, but before they can say anything, the frog king heads straight for us.

We can't escape anyway. It would be a waste not to struggle—even if it won't do any good!

"Get ready, everyone!" calls Lammis.

"Right!"

Everyone lines up on the edge of the cart, puts their candy into their colas, and plugs their bottles' holes closed with their fingers. And when the bubbles fill the insides...

"Aim at the eyes!"

...black streams of gushing cola fly from the plastic bottles, heading for the frog king's eyeballs as it approaches. On contact with its flames, the liquid evaporates instantly. But we've got plenty more.

The frog king, looking annoyed, tries to attack us, but now that its flames have weakened, the other hunters switch to the offensive. That's when we harass it with a second volley.



The group's vice captain, Filmina, manages to help, slinging her own water into the fray. Thanks to her shot, our cola splash hits the thing right in the eyes.

"Gugegugegoohhhh!"

Oh, it's blinking madly. Cola really hurts when it gets in your eyes, doesn't it? I know that feeling.

As the frog king writhes and rages, the hunters don't let this opening go; they begin an all-out attack.

Anyway, we've harassed it enough, so we can leave the rest to them. Now is our chance to beat a retreat!

"Run awaaaay!"

While I bounce around on Lammis's back as she pulls the cart, fleeing at full force, I send a few last words to the frog king.

"Please come again."



With the frog king's vision impaired, the hunters easily downed it. But when it was over, I had a thought.

Wouldn't things have worked out if Lammis just used her Might to throw bottles of cola, or any liquid really, at the frog from close range...? Oh, but she's clumsy, so it's pretty likely her throws wouldn't land. And I had no way to suggest that, either. That's the excuse I'm using. Leave it to someone who's lost his cool to come up with off-the-wall ideas, I guess.

All's well that ends well, so I can't complain, but there must have been a different way. Yeah. I'll reflect on my mistake.

"I'm glad it worked out, Boxxo!"

"Yeah, it's all thanks to you, Boxxo."

I'm happy they're praising me for this, but I feel conflicted about it. If I could give them anything, I could have given them gas cylinders or something. They could throw those, and the frog king would have died in the ensuing explosion. But my inventory is limited to things I've bought from vending machines in the past.

Products with gas in them, canisters and hair spray included, seem weak to impacts and heat, but I've never seen them in vending machines before, though they might actually be sold in one somewhere.

I can't think of any other solutions at the moment, so I suppose this was the only way. Hmm. I'll have to learn a little more about how I work.

And if we're on the subject of things to reflect upon... Points consumption! The two-liter-bottle support and candy-roll-vending mode cost 2,000. Purchasing the cola and candy cost 40 in total, meaning I spent 2,040 points altogether.

It was enough to let us scrape by, so I suppose it's fine.

"Don't do anything reckless again. I felt my gut freeze solid."

"I'm sorry, Director."

Director Bear has walked over and offered some candid advice, to which Lammi bows deeply and apologizes. If you muted the sound, it would look like a girl begging a bear not to eat her.

"But I'm grateful for your help. It was our failure that exposed you all to danger. I am sorry."

"N-no, I'm sorry for acting recklessly."

The bear and the girl bow to each other. It's a surreal but heartwarming sight.

We had casualties, but nobody was wounded gravely enough that they'd never get back on their feet. Seeing Director Bear's relief leaves an impression on me.

"Excellent work, everyone. Once we've rested up, we'll start on the way home. But it's a long way to the settlement. Don't let your guards down."

Director Bear's words marked an end to this battle.



Nothing noteworthy happened after the battle. Everyone was exhausted that night and lacked the energy to cook, so my vending machine sales probably reached the highest point of my career so far.

Oh, right. Cola seems strangely popular now. I think the ones who were splashed by the cola are drinking it not only because they were interested in the taste but also because it's the drink that saved their lives.

Incidentally, I'm sealing away the candy that made the cola explode, at least for a while. I have to change my vending machine form to sell them, so I can't stock anything else.

One night passes in the forest, and we all arrive safe and sound

at the settlement a little after noon the next day.

Relieved at the thought of finally being able to rest our worn-out bodies, what greets us is...a settlement with smoke rising from all over the place. Wait, wait, wait!

Part of the wall, which was just pieces of wood with nails in them, has collapsed. The wooden gate is trashed, too... Where are Karios and Gorth, the gatekeepers?! Please be safe.

“Wh-what is this?! I’m sorry to ask this of you all while you’re exhausted, but it looks like we’ll have to give one final push.”

The majority of the team, leaving the hunters in the cart who hadn’t yet recovered, run toward the settlement.

I hate not being able to move on my own. I would follow right on their heels, burst into the settlement, and go straight to the inn to see if the mistress, Munami, and my regular customers were safe.

But I can’t move unaided. I can’t even walk, much less run...

“E-everyone... Munami, the mistress...”

Lammis’s voice snaps me out of it. She sounds like she’s about to cry. What good will me being depressed do? Lammis has known them far longer than I have.

And there *is* something I can do for the girl who called me a friend!

“Get In sert coins.”

“What? Boxxo?”

“Thank you Please come In sert coins.”

I’ve been thinking for a long time about whether communication is possible. I can say only certain phrases, but I thought about whether I could put them together to have a conversation.

These are the only things I can say: “Welcome,” “Thank you,” “Please come again,” “Get one free with a winner,” “Too bad,” “You’re a winner,” and “Insert coins.”

I can’t pick out specific words I want to say from the phrases, but I wondered if I could start one of the phrases, then say the next one over the first and say something different. I put sentences together in my mind, over and over, staying up late at night, repeating the process while nobody was around—and learned how to cancel words and sounds by interrupting them, and how to change the speed of my pronunciation.

The first time, all I did was start to say, “Get one free with a winner,” stopping after the *get* and then saying “Insert coins” but

delaying everything after the *in*. The second time, I spliced more phrases together to say, “You Please come In.” I wonder if she understands what I mean.

“You’re right. Nothing will happen if I don’t do anything! Let’s go, Boxxo!”

“Wel come.”

The fragmented speech is unsatisfying, but I’ll just have to be happy that I can converse with her at all. One day, if I can take pieces out of the middle of phrases, I might be able to put single letters and sounds together. I’ll just have to train every day.

When we enter the settlement together, we see that the tents and the few buildings near them have been brutally destroyed. Something must have attacked. I lower my gaze and see a giant groove in the ground.

It’s as though a huge rope or something was dragged along the ground... When I take a closer look at the ruined buildings, I see they have traces of something squeezing them from the outside in. In other words, the culprit must be...

“The inn... What happened to the inn?!”

Lammis runs with such speed no one would believe she’s carrying a vending machine on her back. I understand how she feels, but it’s possible that whatever did this is still here.

I can’t put words together to warn her about that. With the way I’m doing it, I need to memorize intelligible phrases beforehand. It’s too difficult to come up with something on the fly in this situation.

If I can’t warn her, I’ll just have to keep an eye out in her stead.

Ninety percent of the tents are wrecked. We don’t see a single soul on the path to the inn, which concerns me. If people were killed, their corpses would be lying about, but even those are absent.

What’s going on? If everyone evacuated, that would be best, but...

“Th-there it is! But... What?! This is awful! Mistress! Munami!”

Lammis, giving a grievous cry, looks at the inn. It’s almost entirely collapsed. The wooden structure, once two stories tall, is unrecognizable; the roof is blown off, and a section between the two floors is crushed, twisted inward.

The door is warped as well, and doesn’t serve the function of a door anymore. The fact that the rest of the place hasn’t collapsed is strange—it looks like any impact could send the whole thing

toppling down.

At this rate, Lammis might dive right in. I have to do something to calm her down. My only choice is to combine the right words for the situation.

“Answer me! Both of you!”

Is she about to run inside? Crap, I need to do something! Then I say the first words that flash across my mind...

“You’re Too bad.”

“B-Boxxo! That was mean!”

Oh, the lady is quite cross with me. But it looks like that got her to calm down a bit. She takes a few deep breaths.

“Sorry, Boxxo. The building might collapse if I touch it. And if they’re not answering... There’s still a chance they evacuated somewhere.”

“Welcome.”

I can only answer her with yes or no, the way I have been.

Thankfully, Lammis is back to her usual self. I got just a quick glance at the inn, but I didn’t see any traces of blood inside it or nearby. Sure, my vision could have been clouded by my desire for their safety, but I decided to remain optimistic.

Defense

“Um, first let’s think where they coulda evacuated to... Oh, the Hunters Association! That’s right, the association!”

Rattled, Lammis slips into her accent. The Hunters Association? Now that she mentions it, I’ve never actually seen the rest of the settlement. I have no idea what kind of building the association is in. I mean, the place is for bringing together brawny hunters who do a lot of fighting, so I have an image in my mind of a fairly large, sturdy building. That bear is the director, so the inside would have to be well built, lest things start breaking.

“C’mon, let’s roll...,” Lammis says, then realizes her accent is coming out. “I mean, we should get going!”

“Thank you Please come again.”

Ahhh, the way I’m talking feels so unclear. But I’ll have to compromise.

The inn was fairly close to the gate, so I haven’t seen any of the inner parts of the settlement until now—and wow, there are a lot of pretty stable-looking buildings here.

Tents made up the majority near the inn and the gate, but this far in, wooden and stone buildings are more numerous. In fact, most of this place seems sturdily built...or at least, it was. Right now, the area is a sorry sight to behold.

Quite a few buildings avoided damage, but for some reason, there’s a narrow, curving path between a closely packed group of buildings. I’ve been seeing this groove a lot, like someone pulled a big rope along the ground. It must be about the thickness of two adults on top of each other.

“If we follow the destruction, it should lead us to survivors!”

“Welcome,” I answer.

Anyway, these grooves are clearly from a giant snake. That brings to mind the frog people. If frogs have one commonly known

enemy, it's the snake. There's even an idiom in Japanese for it: "a frog under a snake's glare," which is used when someone is so scared of something that they can't move.

I can think of several reasons a creature might break out in large numbers, but I often hear about wild animal populations exploding after a natural enemy goes away. This giant snake must be a frog fiend's natural predator, and for whatever reason, it didn't attack them much this year.

Or maybe it came out of hibernation unusually late. Then maybe it got hungry and attacked a human settlement—I wonder if that's possible. It's all mere speculation, but I feel like I'm onto something.

"We'll arrive at the Hunters Association soon!"

Slipping between half- and fully-destroyed buildings, we burst out to see a huge fortress before us.

Wait, what *is* this fortress? It looks impregnable. Its outer walls, made of an unknown black material, shine with a dull glint. They look built to last. Terraces line the second story, and giant bows are fixed to them—ballistae.

All the windows are grated, preventing passage both in and out of the fortress. The main double door appears to be made of iron. I can tell just by looking at the place and its overwhelming sense of gravitas that it's a masterpiece.

The building is the size of a school—it looks like it could easily shelter a hundred people or so. And I suppose I'm only able to calmly analyze it because of the other thing I'm seeing.

In front of the building—the Hunters Association, apparently—is a strange object, long and thick, lying on the ground. The dark-brown thing has scales and two giant heads coming out of one end. Its mouths are wide-open, sharp fangs protruding, and its noses are simply slender holes.

What I mean to say is, it's a massive two-headed snake, and it's dead, riddled with arrows. And around it are the hunters who accompanied the hunting team as well as the ones who stayed in the settlement, including the two gatekeepers.

Karios and Gorth are safe. Phew. I feel the tension leaving my body... Wait, I'm not losing power, right? Now we have to find out if the residents are safe.

"Karios, Gorth! You're both safe!"

Lammis runs over to Karios, who is busy nervously poking the

giant snake.

“Oh, Lammis and Boxxo? Neither of you seem hurt, either. That’s good.”

“I’m glad.”

“Yup, we’re fine!”

“Thank you,” I say. They were worried not only about Lammis, but about me? A vending machine? I can’t quite put into words how happy that makes me feel, so in the near future I’ll have to add an item the gatekeepers might like.

“Oh! Um, and you two are, um...”

Lammis claps her hand at her chest, hoping against hope, and stammers out a half question—and the two of them return a smile.

“Yeah, no worries. The people are all safe. Everyone’s inside.”

“Th-thank goodness!”

Lammis sinks to the ground. Phew—I feel like the relief is going to shut me down.

Still, I had no idea there was such a grand building in the settlement. They say to expect the unexpected, but this is a bit much.

“Come to think of it, you came here recently, didn’t you, Lammis?” says Karios. “There’s a rule that when we sound the magic alarm, the residents here all drop what they’re doing and head here as fast as they can. If we don’t think we can handle things at the gate, we’ll close that up, too, and flee directly to the association headquarters.”

“This is where the transfer circle is, after all,” adds Gorth.

I see. There’s so much damage that I thought it impossible everyone was safe. But with a system like that in place... This settlement is built inside the dungeon, so maybe it’s only natural they’d do this much.

The ramparts were just stacks of logs, so I underestimated things. Either way, the most important thing is that the settlement’s people are safe. The buildings are in ruins, but at least they made it out with their lives.

I’m not planning on sugarcoating it by saying they can just rebuild what was lost. Houses are investments and, at the same time, treasure chests filled with the memories of daily life. At the very least, as someone who’s never lost everything before, it’s not my place to tell the survivors that they should be happy to simply be alive.

Even so, I'm glad they survived. I've been living here for only a scant few weeks, but I truly hope in my heart that nobody dies—not the customers who come to me every day, nor the people who merely pass me by. Since I've died once before...

"Well, we got all sorts of wreckage now. But it was bad three years ago, too. That's why the wall around the gate seems so flimsy, you know."

The settlement was damaged three years ago, too? That explains all the tents being in the other area, while the larger buildings stand here. The people here are hardier than I thought.

"Lammy! Welcome back!"

"Phew. I thought we were done for this time. Today's been quite the day. Lammis, you're not hurt, are you?"

The iron doors have burst open, and several people are coming out. The old couple and the young merchant, my regulars, are among them. Suori, the rambunctious young lady with the twin-tails, looks all right, too. Her black-suited bodyguards are by her side.

Others I've seen several times before are also present. Finally feeling like we can mark an end to this string of events, I mentally give a sigh of relief.

"Thank you."

I didn't intend to say anything like that, but I'm not sure it was a mistake, either. This time for certain, it looks like we can rest easy.

"Boy. Now that we're out of the woods, I'm hungry. Boxxo, I'll have some of that strange water that makes you less tired."

"I'll have the sweet tea."

"I think I'll have the urengi juice. Lammy, Mom, do you want some, too?"

"Yes, that sounds good."

"Sure, thanks!"

Karios wants a sports drink, Gorth wants milk tea, and Munami, Lammis, and the mistress want orange juice. Coming right up—and it's my treat today, you little thieves!

"Oh, why, Boxxo is here, honey."

"You don't need to hit me. I can see it. I'll have the usual water. You want the yellow soup, right, honey?"

"I'll have some of the sweet tea, too. Oh, Munami, I didn't see you there. What a coincidence!"

Fine, the three of you come to me every morning, so you get a gift, too!

“Hey, Boxxo’s here right when we need him. I’ll have some of that cloudy white pasta.”

“I think I’ll take some of the kind with the brown on top.”

“Hmm, which should I have?”

One customer after another crowds around me. Ah, fine then. Normally, I’d be ecstatic at the roaring business, but today I’m leaving my earnings out of the equation. For tonight only, I’m giving away everything for free, dammit!

I’ve stocked sake, beer, cocktails, and even other alcohol like *shochu* with tonic, too. We’re having a party tonight, you lot!

...This might cause me many difficulties in the future, but I can’t lend them any arms or legs, so I’d like them to accept these gifts instead. This is about all I can do—I’ll still be living here as a member of the settlement after all this.

After that, once everyone finished counting the survivors, and those who could no longer live in their homes had their things brought to the Hunters Association, the great feast of drinking and singing began.

The main dish was two-headed snake, and nobody was too nervous to bite into it, whether boiled or fried. How should I put this—the people in this world are *wild*. I never had the chance to eat snake in Japan, but seeing the meat glisten with fat, it does look delicious.

When people realized my products were free, even those who had never bought anything congregated to me. I’ve had to refill several times. The new alcoholic items were flying off the shelves, and many were buying pressed potato chips and oden with the drinks as a snack. It looks like sports drinks will be a hit tomorrow for the people who drank too much. I’ll get some *shijimi* clam miso soup for their inevitable hangovers, too. Heh-heh-heh-heh. It’ll be free for only tonight, you lot. Starting tomorrow, I’ll be raking in the cash.

“Boxxo, I been drinking.”

And now I’m mixed up with a drunk. Lammis, completely intoxicated, leans against me and sits on the floor. In Japan, this wouldn’t be legally kosher, but it seems like this world has a low drinking age. Several other hunters who don’t look any older than high school kids are freely drinking, too.

Lammis's face has gotten completely soft, and her smile stretches from ear to ear. I think this is the first time I've ever seen such a happy drunk.

"Ever since going hunting, we've been doing, like...a lot of work. But it's really, uh, fulfilling, huh?"

"Welcome."

Yeah, I agree. It was a terribly fierce battle; the fact that not a single person died means that everyone in the settlement, not just the hunters, is proficient at surviving. They didn't make their home on a monster-filled stratum for nothing.

All the people here, unlike normal villagers and townspeople, live side by side with danger. If I'd been reincarnated as the same exact person, I'm not sure I could have lived even a few days... Maybe it was actually the mercy of some god to give me a new life as a vending machine.

"I'm pretty happy. And I'm glad about everyone being alive and stuff, too, but..."

She's slurring heavily in her accent now. Her eyes seem set to close at any second. Mere moments away from falling asleep—but she's managing to hold herself back, just barely. She should just let herself fall asleep already.

"After we got back here, everyone was all, like, running to Boxxo, and that made me reeeeeeally happy—like, really, really happy... Zzz."

Okay, there she goes.

That's what you were thinking about, Lammis? She's such a warm, kind person. If I'd met a girl like her in Japan, I might have seriously fallen in love with her.

Good night, Lammis. I'll see you again tomorrow.

Reconstruction Work

Hello. It's your friendly neighborhood vending machine. My home has moved from the front of the inn to outside the Hunters Association HQ.

Munami and the mistress were out the door bright and early this morning. Ah yes—I hear they're going to clear away all the rubble that used to be their inn and then rebuild it.

It would appear that inns are essential for settlements like this. The Hunters Association has stated they will be covering the expenses. Munami and the mistress were acting in a somewhat scary manner, laughing and suggesting they'd build a much grander inn than before.

Okay, all this formal-ese is tiring me out.

I want to turn over a new leaf as well, bracing myself for the trials ahead, but doing things you're not used to doesn't usually go well.

I ended up squandering my funds away yesterday, but starting today, I'm back in business. I've already sold a good deal of items so far.

Since early this morning, drunks have appeared in front of me, swaying like zombies, and my items sold one after another. A large portion of the people who bought something today—after getting a taste last night, since it was free—seem to have become regulars, and now I can't stop laughing about it... Everything's going according to plan!

As soon as Lammis woke up, Director Bear called for her, and she hustled inside the headquarters. If opinions of her have changed because of the recent expedition, that would be a happy thing.

Cup ramen has been selling steadily since this morning, thanks to people having lost their cooking gear, as well as those who partied too hard last night and can't find the energy to cook.

To be honest, if everyone was financially burdened, I would have lowered the cup ramen prices, prepared to take a loss on them, but it seems like everyone living here had been prepared for their homes to be destroyed at any given moment, and most of their money was stored safely with the Hunters Association.

The merchants are hard at work with their businesses, too, having foreseen an influx of hunters coming here for construction and guard jobs. The residents here really are brimming with vitality.

“Boxxo! I got a request directly from the director. Isn’t that cool?!”

“Welcome.”

You’re moving up in the world, kid. But I can guess what the request is.

“And listen to this—it’s to clear away rubble!”

I thought so! Anyone aware of her Might would figure that out.

It’s the perfect place for her to put her strength, which rivals heavy construction equipment, to good use. Employing too much force and destroying things wouldn’t be a problem, either, so the job is a relief despite her low dexterity.

“First he wants me to make the place the inn used to be into a vacant lot. Because they want to build a new one right away.”

If a lot of people are going to be coming here, the inn has to come first. A crowd of simple tents are set up in front of the association headquarters, but I’m sure everyone will want to have a good rest in a proper inn.

Does that mean I’ll be heading back to my regular spot?

Lammis carries me over in front of the former inn. The mistress and Munami are already working on clearing things away. They’re both in their inn uniforms, but it looks like they’re wearing work pants underneath their skirts. I feel like they might as well ditch the skirts in that case, but they’re probably in the dress code.

“Munamiii, Miiiistress, I came to help!”

“Oh, Lammis, you’re here. Now we have the strength of a hundred men. Boxxo came with you, too? Good morning!”

“Welcome.”

I dearly wish I could say “Good morning” and “Good evening.” Everyone’s used to it, though, so they interpret my words as a regular greeting.

“Um, so we just have to put the debris in that cart and then

bring it outside the gate. The people there will separate it into burnable and nonburnable.”

“Oh, I see. Then once the cart’s full, I’ll carry it to them. Boxxo, you stay here and sell drinks and things to everyone, okay?”

“Welcome.”

She places me in my usual spot, which sets me at ease for some reason.

Oh, look at all the people flowing in. They all look young, and several I recognize from the hunt. Are the younger hunters going to be helping with removing the debris?

“Hey, found the site. And check it out—the box with a mind of its own is here, too. Lucky us!”

“Oh, you’re right. Now we can get good food and drinks whenever we want!”

“We’re getting a good reward for these reconstruction jobs, so we can use it like crazy.”

I’m happy you’re happy. Sports drinks look like they’ll be good sellers for a while. I’ll stock a lot of them so they stand out.

Anyway, I suppose I’ll watch everyone work.

These guys aren’t hunters for nothing; even the youngsters who have come to help are doing a great job. The mistress and Munami aren’t doing any less than they are, either. I’ve heard them talk about how their jobs at the inn are heavy labor, and I can see it now.

But Lammis is outdoing them all by leaps and bounds. She easily plucks up a support beam that would take three of them together to lift and brings it over to the cart.

Whenever something is too big to carry, she uses punches and kicks to break it down into more manageable pieces. The hunters watching her are dumbfounded. I don’t blame them. Considering the gap between her cute, tiny stature and her incredible strength... I’d blame them for *not* being surprised.

“It’s full now, so I’ll go dump it. Hup, ho!”

The cart is made for one of those horned boars—a buar—or a horselike animal to carry, but it poses no problem for her Might, and she carries it off like it’s nothing.

The hunters stare in awe as she shrinks into the distance.

“That girl’s amazing. But we can’t lose to her.”

“That’s her Blessing’s power, right? Even so, she’s incredible.”

“Once we get to a break in the reconstruction, I’d want to invite

her to our team, but I'm sure someone like that is already part of a famous one."

I've been listening into their conversation, and it sounds like they think highly of Lammis. She definitely looks like a talented hunter just by the way she works. I get it—I really do. But the fact is that she has no hunter friends. For the moment, she seems to be on good terms with the people living in the settlement, but I don't think she's had a real hunter-related conversation with anyone other than the director and that Fools' whatever.

Previously, she was just spinning her wheels since she had too much strength, and those she formed parties with treated her like a hindrance. Simple brute-force jobs like this are right up her alley. Of course, had the hunters' requests mainly been like this as well, they might have viewed her differently.

"I'm back! Time to work like crazy!"

I thought as much, since Lammis is kicking up dust in her wake as she approaches from the distance, but without anything on her, she's fairly quick footed. Unfortunately, without a suitable burden on her back, her body is too light for her to move the way she wants.

She's grumbled about it before—without something weighing her down, she feels like running is more like jumping around, and it doesn't feel good. Her gloves are fitted with iron plates, too, to manage their weight. She's always needed to control her movement on a regular basis, and due to not being able to move around the way she wants, mistakes are common, which leads to others treating her poorly. I think that's the reason.

She apparently trained under a considerably skilled hunter, too, but that person is in the middle of a journey. She's talked fondly about having had to carry a jug full of water for two whole months.

"Yo, hard at work, I see. Lammis, Boxxo, what's up?"

Now that they've worked up a decent sweat, someone has shown up with sleepy eyes and a great big yawn—Stubble, aka Captain Kerioyl.

That Wild West-style ten-gallon hat must be his favorite. He kept it on even while camping, didn't he? He has skills, for certain, but I sense something fishy in his eyes when he looks at me sometimes, so I honestly can't get rid of my impression of him as a guy I can't completely trust.

"H-hey, isn't that guy the captain of the Menagerie of Fools?"

“You mean the best member on that team of hunters?”

“I wonder if he’ll shake my hand later.”

In their excitement, the busy young hunters drop what they’re doing.

What? Captain Kerioyl is a celebrity? He’s certainly competent, and it did look like his teammates were attached to him—but he’s apparently a popular guy, too. Is the dubiously named Menagerie of Fools a household name among hunters?

“Hey, looks like everyone’s working hard. This old man’s got a bribe to offer you youngsters. Pick anything you want from Boxxo. My treat. That goes for the fine ladies over there, too.”

Yeesh. I don’t think I’ve ever heard someone speak so smugly in real life. I can’t tell if he’s serious or playing around, but whichever the case, he makes me uncomfortable.

The young hunters are making a stir, but Lammis, Munami, and the mistress don’t bat an eye. They just stand there calmly.

“He’s going to treat us. Then I’ll have...this one and this one.”

“Lammy, you’re supposed to buy the most expensive ones first.”

“Then I’ll take the one with the boiled food in it as a snack. A hundred of them.”

Th-those two have no mercy. They run an inn, so they must be used to dealing with people like him.

“Th-that’s a little much. Can I ask you to keep it to one or two things?”

Captain Kerioyl is grimacing as he looks into his coin pouch. That’s good—keep going. He looks like you can push him around at first...but even with his sleepy, lax expression, the eyes peeking out from under his hat brim have a sharpness that ruins that impression.

“Lammis, you interested in joining our party? And Boxxo, too, of course.”

As lightly as asking a friend if they want to grab lunch, he has clapped down onto Lammis’s shoulders and blurted something incredible.

He’s chosen the direct approach instead of beating around the bush. How does Lammis plan to answer him? Judging by the envy on the hunters’ faces, it must be a fair honor for this group—the Menagerie of Fools—to invite someone.

“What? No thanks,” she replies immediately, brushing his hands off her shoulders. Well done. I’m so proud of you.

As though he didn't think she'd turn him down, his eyes boggle and his jaw drops. Oh, and your trademark hat is crooked there.

"I...I see. W-well, give it some thought. I'll be waiting for you to change your mind. Anyway, I'll buy some water from Boxxo. This hangover is killing me..."

"You're Too bad."

Hey, your hat's about to fall off.

Gold and Silver Coins

Captain Kerioyl left looking pretty bummed out.

If you ask me, I think refusing was the right choice. The Menagerie of Fools may be a famous team, but joining would mean more fighting. I know that even being a lone hunter means you're side by side with danger. But right now, rather than being tossed around in a group of powerhouses, I think—one-sidedly anyway—that she should hunker down and work on her abilities.

Anyway, that's only my opinion. Why did Lammis actually refuse, though? That's a mystery to me.

"Hey, you, why did you turn down an invitation to the Menagerie of Fools?!"

Oh, it's the short-haired hunter. Nice assist! That's what I wanted to know.

"Hmm... Well, we're in the middle of rebuilding the settlement. We have to make sure we have enough hands, right?"

The hunters' mouths hang open. Ah, Lammis...I don't think he meant right this instant. If you said so, I'm sure he would wait until the reconstruction was finished.

"Okay, let's all keep doing our best!"

Everyone aside from her sighs and goes back to work. Cocking her head in confusion at the situation, Lammis gets back to clearing the rubble away, too.

No particularly interesting events happen after that, and noon comes. I sell several cups of ramen and cans of oden to the inn reconstruction group, and then Lammis puts me on her back and moves me in front of the Hunters Association.

I sell one item after another to the people who were waiting for my arrival. If this keeps up, I'll make back my losses from yesterday in no time.

Most of these customers have purchasing experience, but a

good handful are entirely new. I don't recognize their faces, which means they must have come to the Clearflow Lake stratum just today.

All the new people have one thing in common—they're wearing cloth headbands, long sleeves, and pants with lots of pockets. They look very craftsmanlike. With just a quick glance, I see around a hundred of them. That would mean the settlement's population has at least doubled.

What a bother... I'm going to sell a ton of things again, aren't I? What a bother, seriously—such a pain... I'll have to add up all these points later.

"Okay, Boxxo, I'm going back to work!"

"Welcome."

I've been returned to my usual spot in front of the inn, and as I'm interacting with customers, a person suddenly steps in front of me.

I see this world has glasses and businesslike clothing as well. A lady with black-rimmed glasses, a green button-down, and a skirt that only goes a little above her knees is watching me closely.

If this were Japan, I'd say she looks like an accountant or a lawyer. The corners of her eyes are angled slightly upward, making her look a little scary, but she's a beauty.

A large man, about six and a half feet tall, stands behind her. An acquaintance of hers? He's top-heavy with hulking muscles and long arms, and he has wrinkles on his brow, downward-slanting eyes, and a low nose. My honest first impression of him is that he looks like a friendly gorilla.

He's wearing something like a suit, but it's bulging in places and looks about to tear open at any moment. He's wearing something similar to a giant backpack.

"Would I be correct in my assumption that you are the box with a mind? I believe you were called Boxxo."

Suddenly, the woman is speaking to me. Wait, how should I reply? F-for now, I'll give her my usual greeting.

"Welcome."

"According to the information we received earlier, that would be a yes, am I correct?"

...This woman is hard to deal with! Her expression is completely unchanging, and she's staggeringly intimidating. Her gaze is enough to make me stiffen up. Then again, I am a vending

machine.

What's she after? It seems serious. Wh-what should I do?

"Huh? What's wrong, Boxxo? Oh, um, who might you be?"

Lammis pops out from behind me and openly addresses the glasses-wearing lady.

"You must be Lammis. I apologize for my rudeness. My name is Acowi, and I work in the money-exchange business. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. The one behind me is my aide, Gocguy."

"Pleased to meet you."

Acowi speaks in a cold, clear voice, while Gocguy's tone is warm and relaxed. They're polar opposites.

Anyway, the money-exchange business? The modern version of that would be converting yen to dollars and the like, right? From what I recall, a long time ago it was a business that would exchange gold coins for silver coins and vice versa. I think I heard it was the origin of banks.

"We've received word that this stratum is running short on silver coins. That's the reason for our visit."

All right, who's the one hoarding all the silver coins? That's simply disgraceful.

"Oh, well, everyone pays Boxxo in silver coins, after all!"

Shh! Lammis, you can't say that. Er, wait, are they here to file a complaint because I'm blocking the flow of money by hoarding all the silver coins?

Even if they are, I can't give them back. I converted them into points. There's nothing I can do now.

"I see my suspicions were correct. We decided this would be a good opportunity to come to you, Boxxo, with a proposal. We've brought about one hundred gold coins with us. Could I exchange them for several of the silver coins you have?"

Business talks? I'm not opposed to converting between silver and gold coins, but one gold coin is the same as about a hundred silver coins, isn't it? In yen, that would make a single one worth ten thousand. Disregarding fluctuations, of course, but it would come out to around that. They brought a hundred of them, too—that's a sizable sum. Is this going to be all right?

I'd like to exchange them for her if I can, but what should I do?

Do I have a money-exchanging feature? Normally, vending machines don't have any. Um, I just did a quick skim of the list and

didn't see anything.

"Too bad."

"Does that mean you cannot comply?"

I'm sorry. I'd like to, but I have no way to.

"Oh, but if you can't exchange them, can't you just buy something with gold coins? Won't change come out?"

Lammis's casual suggestion causes Acowi's disappointed face to light up. Her eyes begin to sparkle in the first display of emotion I've seen from her.

I wonder what would actually happen if you put in a gold coin. Nobody's ever tried it before. Since I don't know if I can give change, no one has been foolhardy enough to test it.

"I see! Gocguy, we're buying in bulk. The gold coins, please."

Ah, the first insertion. Wh-what should I do? If they don't get change, I'll give them back the gold coin.

Ohhh, the first gold coin of my life as a vending machine is inside my body. If she buys something that costs one silver coin, ninety-nine silver coins will come out. I just have to man up—you never know until you try.

A sensation I've never felt before bubbles up inside me, and my vending machine body vibrates. So this is what it's like for a gold coin to enter your body. Wait, now's not the time to be basking in the afterglow. What happened with the change?

Silver coins clatter down in a stream into the change saucer. The coins overflow and begin dropping to the ground. The hunters watching from farther away are gulping, I see.

Change came out normally—if it hadn't, they might have treated me like a thief.

"This should be good. Let's go on a shopping spree, shall we?"

One after another, the gold coins are inserted, and one after another the silver coins are expelled. The giant Gocguy bends down and collects every last silver.

After putting in ten gold coins, Acowi seems satisfied. She stares at the backpack filled with silver coins, looking quite pleased. She must get more expressive when money is involved.

"Any more than this and we may put a burden on Boxxo, so we'll stop for now. I will be back at a later date to purchase more. I look forward to working with you again."

She looks like she's about to start skipping away. Gocguy is carrying the pack stuffed with coins without struggling. He seems as

strong as his appearance would suggest.

I wonder if I'll be seeing them frequently for a long time. Well, they don't seem like bad people.

"Boxxo, you're really rich, huh? We better be careful nobody takes your money."

"Welcome."

She's right. Well, I'm not sure anyone could get money out even if they destroyed me and broke me down. The items I sell are part of a system that just makes them, so it doesn't feel like I have coins inside me. It's more like they appeared when the situation called for it.

Meanwhile, several enthusiastic pairs of eyes are staring this way. For the younger hunters, my body—having swallowed ten gold coins—must look pretty appealing.

Come to think of it, it's unwise to put vending machines in unsafe places. That goes to show how peaceful Japan is to allow them to exist almost everywhere.

For a while, I should be on my guard around people who look like they're having any dumb ideas.

"Oh, right. Sorry, Boxxo! I kept forgetting to tell you. It looks like we won't be able to see Hulemy for a while. I sent her a letter, but I didn't get a reply... I think she's still relaxing somewhere in the stratum. We'll have to stay here until I can get in touch with her. Is that okay?"

Lammis puts her hands together and bows to me. I tell her, "Welcome." For a moment, I wondered who Hulemy was, but that's her magic-item-engineer friend she talked about when we first met, isn't it?

I think to myself, in a detached way: Oh, right, that was the original goal, wasn't it?

The day was filled with strange meetings, but the first day of reconstruction is now about to end without any problems in particular. Night falls, and after settling into my regular spot in front of the Hunters Association and selling dinners, I watch mindlessly as the settlement's lights go out, one by one.

There's a magic item that's pretty much a light bulb, and there are a few of them scattered about the settlement, too, but it's still very dark compared to nighttime in Japan. Magic items apparently fetch high prices, and most normal households don't use them.

Generally, most of the tents have lanterns or even torches set up.

The spots around those lights are illuminated, but a deep darkness lingers just a few steps away.

The spot that I'm in is away from those lights as well. Normally, I'd be easily missed, but I'm a vending machine. I give off my own light, so I always stand out to an unnatural degree.

But today, I turn off the lights, and then I purchase the Paint-Change feature and paint myself all in black. Partly because of the hunters who watched the exchange earlier but also because of the incident with that low-life villain trying to steal my money during the expedition. I decide that at night, I'll blend in with the darkness to avoid any unnecessary quarrels.

"What? Isn't it always around here?"

"Maybe they moved it. That crazy-strong girl is always carrying it around, remember?"

"Shit. Let's head around to the inn."

Speak of the devil. They aren't the same hunters we were working with before, but a group of three men seems to be searching for me.

If they actually make a move on me, I do have Force Field, and if I play my voice at maximum volume, several people from the Hunters Association would burst out, so it wouldn't be a problem. But I suppose peaceful resolutions are the best.

Vending Machine for Adults

One week has passed. The settlement is bubbling with a revivalist mood, and it's been fairly lively.

I can tell the new residents apart because they're always surprised to see me. Very easy to understand.

It baffled me how the Hunters Association, which essentially runs the settlement by itself, can provide for so many people. Apparently, though, materials scavenged from that two-headed snake and the king frog fiend were sold for absurd amounts.

Also, the Hunters Association contract states that in exchange for the promise of significant rewards, the association has advance claim to all the materials hunting teams get from slaying monsters. The hunters are stomping their feet in frustration this time.

Ultimately, those who participated in the king-frog-fiend hunt received a special reward, and since then, none of them have complained. Come to think of it, the hunters who were wounded and couldn't escape bought a lot from me, saying, "You're the reason we're alive—thank you."

The two-headed snake is called a double serpent, a monster that inhabits the Clearflow Lake stratum. As I predicted, it's a natural enemy of the frog people, and usually they fight each other, preventing large-scale outbreaks. This time, the double serpent had evidently been on a long trip, attacking smaller frog-people settlements and strengthening itself.

The Hunters Association's view is that it was on its way to the settlement at which we'd been fighting because it assumed there would be a lot of frogs there now, but it spotted the human settlement first, and that's how this happened.

As for why I'm so well-informed on the subject—that would be because I'm currently in the Hunters Association's director's office.

"So that's about the gist of what happened. Boxxo, you and

Lammis both did very well. If you hadn't been there, it's likely the situation would have kept getting worse. Thank you."

"O-oh, please, raise your head."

Director Bear rises from the sofa and begins to bow, and Lammis waves her arms wildly, trying to get him to stop. So wildly, in fact, that she's creating wind currents. Such is her incredible Might.

Meanwhile, a vending machine stands next to her. If someone from Earth saw this, they'd doubt their own eyes.

"Explaining the special reward and the entire picture of the incident was one reason I brought the two of you here, but I did have one thing I wanted to ask Boxxo."

Hmm? I wonder what it is. Hearing him speak in such a roundabout way is making me nervous. Whenever Director Bear's eyes get serious—my, let's say, animalistic survival instincts whisper to run away. Even though I'm a vending machine.

I know he's a gentleman on the inside, but the pressure of a giant bear being in front of you isn't something you can easily get used to.

"Boxxo, I've heard you can produce anything somebody wants as an item for purchase. Is this true?"

That's an exaggeration. I can select items that I think someone will want, but the only items I can get are the ones I've bought from vending machines before.

If I could deliver anything, I could just stock handguns and weapons, and that fight probably would have gone a lot more easily. I can't have anything vending machines wouldn't sell, and though I'm proud I've bought almost everything I've ever seen in one, there are probably still more vending machine products in the world that I'm not aware of.

My answer is no, but I still want to tell him that, to a certain extent, I can. How should I respond?

"Welcome Too bad."

"Hmm. What does that mean?"

"I think Boxxo wants to say that he can do it, but he can't do some things."

"Welcome."

Lammis's interpretations are constantly saving me.

Director Bear seems to understand; he nods several times. Wow, he looks like a bear begging people for food at the zoo— No, that's

a rude thought.

"I see—so that's how it is. Then, if possible, I have a request of you. Uh, Lammis, could you wait outside? I have something secret to talk to Boxxo about."

"Sure. Um, should I wait on the first floor?"

"Yes, thank you. I'll send someone to get you once we're done."

"Okay, got it. Mom always said not to interrupt men when they're talking. I'll be waiting downstairs!"

"Thank you," I say as she withdraws. Lammis waves her arm around behind her and closes the door.

A bear and a vending machine in a small room. Of course, if he doesn't start talking, we won't get anywhere.

"First, I'll give you an overview of the situation. A lot of people are surging into this settlement right now. Originally, until three years ago, this place flourished more... In fact, it was big enough to be called a town."

I could tell there are more people in the settlement just through my sales, but the inn's mistress and Karios mentioned something happening three years ago, too.

A place you would call a full-fledged town... The buildings around the Hunters Association are grand, and I always thought the settlement was simply too big for its population of about a hundred, but now I understand. That makes sense.

"We lost many residents during that incident, and many of those who survived left. The only ones who stayed were the hunters and the most enthusiastic businesspeople. We levy no taxes here. They remained here for that, so this incident didn't scare them off—in fact, it already looks like they'll make up for their losses."

The people here really are hardy. As a resident here, they're the best I could depend on.

"After this incident with the double serpent, word got out that we killed it without any deaths. People began to praise our defensive capabilities, and many gathered wishing to move here, which is why we're thriving right now. We plan to not only repair the ruined homes but also build new ones, and stores as well."

That means I'll have many more chances to profit. I'll have to start thinking about what new products and features I want to get.

"An increase in people causes several problems. I have hopes for you in the food area, Boxxo, but the merchants understand the facts, too. Many goods are now flowing in, so it's not a big worry."

Hmm. I see. Shops are starting to line up in front of the Hunters Association, after all. My cup ramen sales have fallen lately, so I was just looking for a new product. Of course, I've been selling more beverages to make up for it, so my total profits are holding steady.

It seems like the seasoned veterans who have lived through the multifaceted Japanese-beverage business world are still overwhelming this world's drinks with their flavors and novelty.

"I'm sorry—I got off topic. Anyway, for the real problem... The upcoming concern I've been worried about the most is related to our sexual manners and customs. We bear fiends have little such desire outside of our breeding season, but that isn't true for humans. With the increase in people, we're facing a shortage of supply to meet demand."

I see—so this is the kind of talk he wanted to have. Which is why he had Lammi's leave.

The tidbit that Director Bear is part of a race called bear fiends is valuable, but I'll leave that aside for now. Hmm... Ever since my body turned metal, it seems as if I've been released from desires like that, but I do keenly understand.

"And then there's the problem of hygiene. If disease spreads, it will hold up the reconstruction work. Nevertheless, if we control it too strictly, we'll have a different problem on our hands. I know this is an unreasonable request, but, Boxxo, have you any ideas?"

It really is unreasonable. Hmm... I do have one idea regarding diseases. But I'm not too knowledgeable about this world, so I'm not sure if something similar exists.

To test it out, I'll give him one and see his reaction.

The items come in boxes, so I have to add a new feature. Let's see... I suppose Boxed-Item Support would work. Hmm, yes—I can sell boxed candy and cigarettes with it, too. The issue is that I've never smoked once in my life, so I'll have to give up on selling the latter.

I add the item and put it on display.

"Interesting—so that's how you change your products. Hmm... What is this box? Is this your plan, Boxxo?"

"Welcome."

"Then I will buy one. It looks like there are three varieties, so I'll buy them all. Still, ten silver coins isn't very cheap."

These go for about a thousand yen a box in Japan, so I set their

price to align with the drinks—if it's too expensive, I'll think about changing it.

"I open the box, yes? It looks like a small pouch with nicks in it. Do I tear this part open to get it out?"

"Welcome."

"Hmm, so I'm not wrong, then. With my hands, this is a bit hard to manage. I know—this works out nicely. I'll call her. Shirley, please come in."

At Director Bear's summons, another door along the wall opens up, and a woman appears in the doorway.

If I were human, I would have said "whoa."

The evening dress clinging to her body has a slit that goes all the way up to her waist, and her long, shapely legs look like porcelain, coming in and out of view with every step she takes. Her shoulders are bare, and the neckline is cut quite boldly as well, causing the eyes to naturally focus on her ample cleavage.

It would be no exaggeration to say that she has the ideal body any woman would be jealous of. On top of that, her distinct features are without flaw.

Her lustrous black hair flows down her back, and her eyes, heavily lidded and wistful, when combined with her light-crimson lipstick, are the pinnacle of seduction.

Oh, she does *that* sort of work. The way she presents herself has that sort of appeal.

"Oh, would this be Boxxo? Pleased to meet you. I'm Shirley."

Even her smile is sexy. If my body weren't a vending machine, I wouldn't even be able to look her in the eyes. And the way she's crossed her legs after sitting on the sofa—she has to be purposely keeping things just barely out of sight.

"This is the item Boxxo has provided us. It's a bit hard to do with my hands. Could I get you to do it?"

"Of course. This item will help us out, right? I wonder, do you tear it here...? Oh. Now, this is a strange material. It stretches and contracts—how interesting."

Why do I feel like a terrible person?

"There's a warm fluid stuck to the sides. Is this for...?"

"I have no idea. Come to think of it, there was a paper inside the box. Try reading that."

"Thank you. Oh—I see how it is. There's a helpful diagram here, so it's easy to see."

I wish she would stop smiling so voluptuously. I feel like I'm going to malfunction.

"Oh, so you know? How is this item used?"

"You put this on a gentlemen's member before inserting it into a woman's secret place. It looks like the different boxes are to suit a man's size. With something this thin, it won't get in the way of the act, but it will still prevent disease. What a fine article this is."

As might be expected from a professional—she figured out what the condom was at a glance. She looks truly happy, rather than trying to flatter me.

As an aside, the boxes are separated into small, medium, and large. If I can only stock things I've bought in my past life, then why am I able to stock three different sizes? All I'll say is this: They're my vanity, my pride, and my reality. I'm sure every man has done some testing while imagining the real thing...right?

Shirley goes through the boxes, checking their sizes, quantities, and prices, taking notes and nodding to herself. "I would very much like to purchase these. If you have any other products you can recommend, I'd like to see them as well."



I...I guess I have no choice. She's being so insistent that I have to show her. S-still, I haven't bought much in the way of adult products, so there won't be too many.

After that, we manage to strike an agreement, and Shirley leaves the director's office, swaying her hips as she goes. I was in some trouble at the end when she left me with a "If you were human, I would have personally offered my services. How unfortunate."

But after meeting back up with Lammi...

"Huh? Boxxo, you feel a little warm. Was there something that made you happy?"

...she said something that made me freeze. I almost panicked that my Heat-Retention feature had broken. That was when I first learned that her perceptiveness was both a good and a bad thing.

The Public Baths

“Boxxo, let’s get going.”

Having finished her dinner, Lammis greets me at my position outside the Hunters Association headquarters.

Now that she mentions it, it’s today, isn’t it? Lammis goes somewhere every third evening, and lately she’s been taking me with her no matter what.

Today, once again, she slides me onto her back and, skipping lightly, heads for our destination.

“Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm! I worked a whole lot today, so I can’t wait to—”

“Is that you, Lammis? And Boxxo as well. Thank you for the other day.”

This all-too-silky voice—Shirley? She’s the lady running the night business, the one I provided the condoms to as a result of the sex-related issue before.

Is she on her way to work? She looks elegant today, wearing the same incredibly exposing evening dress as last time.

“Shirley, are you on your way to work?”

“No. I had some free time this afternoon, so I decided I would wash off a little sweat.”

“Oh! Then we’re going to the same place. I’m going to the bath now, too.”

Yes—today is public-bath day. Normally, Lammis just wipes herself with a wet cloth, but she always makes sure to go to the public baths once every three days. On these days, she’s in a good mood all day long.

She seems to love taking baths, but it costs a fair bit of money, so she puts up with taking only one every three days.

“Ah, I see. How lucky of me—and Boxxo is with you,” she says, casting a flirtatious glance at me. I may be a machine, but you’re

making my heart pound. Could you please stop?

There's a reason Lammis is happy to be going with me. The reason will become clear as soon as we arrive at the public baths, but— Oh, we're here already. I can see a building made of stone up ahead.

It's the largest building in the Clearflow Lake stratum, next to the Hunters Association's. At a glance, it looks like a school gymnasium, but this is the public baths.

The walls are made of stone, and the curved roof looks wooden. There are two entrances, the left being for women and the right for men—not the masculine dream of a mixed bath.

“Great, we're here! Chaaaaaarge!”

Lammis, still excited, runs through the left entrance without hesitation—with me on her back.

Inside, it's a room with a wooden floor, and everyone takes their shoes off before stepping onto it. Beyond that is a high platform against the wall, like the attendant's booth at a Japanese public bath. Atop the platform sits a little old lady with a face full of wrinkles.

“It's five silver coins.”

“Here you go, five coins.”

She hands the silver to the old lady and proceeds inside without setting me down. There's a changing room with lockers lined up on the wall, where you can put belongings and clothes. And well, the reason I can observe this calmly is because it isn't my first time here.

She places me in a corner of the changing room, as always, so I decide to take a quick look around.

The parts with benches for resting and magic-item-looking things for weighing yourself seem like what you'd expect from a normal bath. We appear to have come during an off-hour, and aside from Lammis—and Shirley, who entered after us—there are only two others.

One looks like she's about to get into the bath. She's completely naked, with nothing extra to cover her up.

She has an ample chest, an ample waist, and an ample bottom. A perfectly well-endowed...bear. Well, you know. She may be female, but seeing a beast person in the nude doesn't make me happy at all.

And in this world, the beast people aren't the simple kind

where only their ears and tails are animallike—these are actual animals, and the sole impression I have of seeing them naked is “I think I’ve seen this at the zoo before, or on TV.”

The other person is a human female, but she’s the regular old lady who visits me early in the morning, so I have no particular comment.

“Woowww! Shirley, you’re so pretty... I’m jealous!”

“Hee-hee. Thank you.”

I hear the girls talking, so without particularly thinking about it—just casually, no ulterior motives whatsoever—I look over at them.

Lammis is using an arm to hold up the pair of big beach balls on her chest. Leaning forward in nothing but her panties, she has quite the suggestive appearance as she stares at Shirley. No—those aren’t beach balls. Her breasts are just way too big.

When fully liberated, they pack an incredible punch. If a man saw them, I don’t think he could be blamed for forgetting himself and staring for a while. My male instincts may or may not be shouting that averting my eyes would be a crime.

And her eyes are pointedly focused on Shirley, who’s completely naked. But why? She has a perfect body, and she’s supposed to be sexy, but it doesn’t turn me on. She has an ethereal sort of look to her, as though I’m looking at a piece of art. There is no carnal desire there—just a bewitching beauty.

At times like these, I’m not sure whether I should be thankful I don’t have a physical body, or frustrated. It’s hard to decide.

“Boxxo, can we buy the usual things?”

Whoops. Lammis just spoke to me, snapping me out of it. Right—that’s the reason I’m here.

I add hand towels, bath towels, soap, shampoo, and hair treatment to my vending machine items. Ever since Lammis first said we were going to the baths and I stocked bath goods out of consideration, I ended up being taken to the changing room so that everyone could make more use of me.

This is certainly not something I asked for. I’d like to emphasize that this was purely coincidental. Yes—a product of coincidence. I am not sitting here in this public bath changing room because I want to, and I need to make sure that’s clear.

“This liquid hair-washing detergent feels great in my fingers, and it makes my hair unbelievably shiny. I’ve just run out of it, so

maybe I'll buy a few extra. Oh, but I'll have to carry them back with me."

"Then after we get out, let's go to your shop with Boxxo. Does that sound good, Boxxo?"

"Welcome."

Now that she mentions it, I've never been to her shop before, so I have a fair bit of interest in it. I wonder if it's a gaudy place with neon signs, like in Japan. Or maybe it's made to look no different from a house at first so they can do their business in private.

"Oh, that would be nice. I wanted to order more of *those* from Boxxo, too," she says in a seductive voice while combing her hair back, completely naked, making me worried my internal circuitry will short out. If I had a heart, it would be beating out of control right now.

"Okay. Boxxo, we're going in, so wait here for a bit."

"Please come again."

Go in up to your shoulders and warm your whole body. Don't mind me—you can take your time. Really, don't pay any attention to me. Clean every last part of your body and wash away today's exhaustion.

They disappear into the bathing room, so I wait patiently for time to pass. Nobody is here, and I don't need to do anything, so I just keep waiting.

Should be about time—it usually happens around now.

"Phew, I'm bushed."

"We made a lot today. Want to go for drinks after this?"

"That sounds great!"

There they are. Because it gets more dangerous after dark in the wild, hunters generally finish their work around this time and come to wash off the grime from their outdoor activities.

You may think that after witnessing perfect beauty, anything else will affect you less—but that isn't the case. Rather than bodies like works of art, ones with some sort of flaw or imbalance are easier to appreciate, have more humanness to them, and feel more attractive to me.

And youth itself can be a weapon all its own. However much you care for yourself, you can't get back the tight skin and physical beauty that only the young are permitted to have...or so I remember a friend of mine once passionately explaining. That is certainly not my own opinion.

Anyway, my friend's opinion, which I suddenly remembered, doesn't matter. A group of young hunters throw open the door and enter. I can't tell their ages, but from the way they talk, they're probably kids.

The ones who came are two foxes and two raccoons, all walking on two legs.

Ah, yeah. The public baths have turned into a zoo.

The settlement has a lot of people in it, and I see beast people like Director Bear every once in a while. They have better physical abilities than humans, and hunters include them in their teams quite often. It's not strange for a bunch of them to show up at once.

I mean—this would actually be easier to enjoy if I closed my eyes. Their voices sound like young women, after all.

"I've been shedding a lot lately."

"That's just because it's that time of year, isn't it?"

"And I've been feeling that ache recently."

"Yeah, we'll be in heat soon. If you see any good males, be sure to tell me."

Right, well. This isn't enjoyable at all. It's too vivid.

They say high school girls don't get embarrassed about this stuff when there are no men around—but with the animal instincts mixed in, the sexual openness is too much for me.

"Oh, Boxxo's here today! I'm going to buy the fur wash."

"Me too, me too!"

Well, they are covered in fur, so they go through a whole lot of shampoo and treatment. I'm not about to complain about good customers.

"If this makes my coat of fur look good, it'll have all the males howling."

"And they can't resist the scent, either! The other day, my boyfriend was getting into it even though he's not in heat."

The raccoons and foxes disappear into the bath room in a friendly line. I mean, their chests may be slightly curved and their bottoms may look like a lady's, but that doesn't mean they seem sexy to me. Apparently, things like this do arouse certain people, but I'm not that sophisticated.

Anyway, I'm a vending machine, so even if they were humans, I couldn't care less about naked women. However, I must say that having been a human male originally, a little part of it still tugs at me, saying it would be a waste not to enjoy the moment.

Yes—before I am a vending machine, I have the soul of a man, and I must not forget it!

“Phew. Now that I’m out, maybe I’ll have a drink.”

“Welcome,” I say to the old woman.

Ma’am, I would recommend either the cold fruit milk or the coffee milk for your post-bath beverage. If you sweat too much, then rehydrate with a sports drink.

“I think I’ll buy this drink with the odd color.”

Oh, I knew she’d choose the fruit milk. Obviously, you have to have that or coffee milk after getting out of the bath. And of course, in a jar. This is a public bath tradition that I won’t yield.

A paper illustrating how to properly open the container is affixed to the side of the vending machine, so everything is perfect. Lammis is the artist, by the way. Her pictures are pretty flavorful and cute. I like them quite a bit.

“Phew! I was a little dizzy. This really hits the spot.”

“Thank you. Please come again.”

Seeing a customer’s joy after buying an item really is the moment I feel happiest as a vending machine... Wait, wasn’t I thinking about something else before? Well, whatever.

“Aaah. I feel refreshed.”

“That felt good.”

Oh, and while I was talking to the old lady, Lammis and Shirley finished their bath. I’m not the only one who thinks wearing nothing but a bath towel is hotter than being completely naked, am I?

That slim line, where you can almost see but you can’t, amplifies the allure. Yes, this isn’t bad at all.

“Boxxo, I’ll have a cold one! The brown kind today.”

“I think I’ll have the same.”

They each grab their freshly chilled coffee milk, put a hand on their hip, and gulp it down. The whole putting-a-hand-on-your-hip-while-you-drink thing seems to span cultures—even different worlds.

Fresh from the bath, their flushed bodies are permeated by my white liquid—but when I describe it like that, it sounds lewd.

Lammis finishes hers off and exhales noisily. “Shoot, this is the best!”

Lammis, I’m happy you’re happy, but you’re acting like an old man.

"The cold feels good," says Shirley after letting out a more refined breath. Compared to Lammis, Shirley is twisting to and fro. It's too sexy; it's poison for the eyes. She exudes a certain sophisticated sex appeal, the likes of which would immediately put me in trouble if I were a boy in puberty.

Several customers come in while they're changing, too, and they start to buy things from me. As I interact with them the same way I usually do, the girls finish changing, and soon it's time to go home.

"I'm bringing Boxxo back home, so if you want anything else, get it now!" calls out Lammis. People bursting out of the bath room and women in the middle of changing all swarm me, and I sell quite a few cold beverages, bottles of shampoo, and different varieties of towels.

"Heeey, excuse me, could you lend Boxxo to the guys' side, too?!" comes a man's loud voice from the other side of the wall separating the genders. Was that the gatekeeper Karios? I don't have a problem with it, so I reply with a "Welcome" at maximum volume.

"Then come to the public bath entrance to get him!"

"Okay, got it. Come on, you lot!"

When Lammis goes out, a group of sordid, half-naked men are there waiting. The guys hoist me up like a portable shrine and carry me into the men's changing room.

"Give him right back! We still have somewhere to go," Lammis calls after them.

"Will do. Let's buy what we want!"

They carry me into the changing room, then set me down, after which half-naked and fully naked men surround me, buying my products like it's the end of the world.

Most of the men don't bother with the hair treatment or the shampoo; they just get soap and wash their whole body with it, so the soap is selling out at an alarming rate.

The coffee milk is also a hit, and the majority of the men getting out of the bath are buying it. And as though it's simply common practice in this world, they all put their hands on their hips while they drink it.

Once they're done buying things, they carry me back outside.

"Welcome back," says Lammis, who is waiting for me.

"Thank you," I answer. She smiles in response.

“Man, that was a huge help, Boxxo,” says Karios. “We’re going to start wanting one of you in every household.”

“True,” agrees Gorth, nodding deeply. They’re together all the time, huh? You’d think it would feel stifling to be together both on and off the job, but they must have an affinity for each other. Wait—are they like that, maybe? No, that’s a bit of an assumption to be making...

“Oh, hello, Karios, Gorth. Thank you again for your regular patronage.”

They notice Shirley there as she smiles seductively and bows a little, and they bow their own heads awkwardly.

I see—they’re regulars, apparently? I think I can still interact with them from now on without giving them weird looks, maybe.

“Hup, ho! Shirley, sorry for making you wait. We can go now!”

“This was perfect to cool down, so don’t worry.”

They bring me along to her workplace, and Karios and Gorth follow closely behind. I’m pretty sure I know why. Night has fallen, so having them here makes the nighttime streets safer for us anyway.

Without any particular problems, Shirley’s workplace comes into sight. I was prepared to pass through an alley or something, but we did none of that; the shop was farther down a main street.

As we walk on, we see the number of young men, as well as women in exposing outfits, increase. I figured we were close to the shop, but it is—how should I put this?—a good and proper storefront.

It looks and feels like a row of one-story tenements. A strong-bodied man wearing armor has his lance at the ready, perhaps both out of intimidation and to impart a sense of safety.

“All right. Lammis, Boxxo, come this way.”

Shirley trades glances with the pair behind us and nods, and I see them both scratch the backs of their heads in slight embarrassment.

After that, as Lammis happily chows down on some high-class tea snacks, I finish our business of selling her additional condoms and we chat for a bit. When it gets late, we set ourselves on the road home.

“It’s late, so I’ll have some of your food and then go to sleep.”

Despite carrying a vending machine with her Might, she is still a cute girl. There’s no being too cautious, either, so I shine my light

around us to keep watch.

“I know. Today you can sleep inside with me instead of outside. I smell really good today. Boxxo, if you were human, you could sleep next to me. Does that make you feel too bad?”

Without thinking, I respond to her joke. “Too bad.”

“Huh? Boxxo, what...?”

My voice slipped out. I have to fool her.

“Get one free with a winner.”

“Boxxo, are you playing dumb? Hey, come on, what did you say, really?”

Ugh. She doesn’t usually pursue things like this. I can see her profile from behind; she seems like she’s having fun, so she must be teasing me.

“Come on, tell me!”

“Please come again.”

Our conversation sounds unintelligible, but Lammis is smiling. If I had a face, I might be smiling right along with her. It’s the kind of night where even a conversation like this makes me happy, and I really start to feel like being a vending machine isn’t so bad.

The Slot Machine

I decided to get another new feature.

I've wanted it for a while, but I was always busy with one thing or another and kept delaying it. Things have calmed down recently, though, so I jumped in and bought it...

"Get one free with a winner."

"All right, all right, come on, seven, seven, siiiiiix, whaaaaaaaaaat?!"

"Too bad."

Yes—I can finally use these voice lines for their original purpose. I added a slot machine. The kind everyone hopes for at least once, where you get a second item for free if you line up three sevens.

Ever since introducing it, my sales have gone up almost 30 percent. This settlement has few places to go for entertainment, so even a simple slot machine is hooking in one after another.

Aside from that, a shady rumor has been going around that if you hit the jackpot, you'll have good luck all day, and it seems like there are more people buying just to try their luck.

My aim was that they could enjoy a little more spice in their day-to-day lives, but one of my regulars has gotten more addicted than I thought he would, and today he's buying too much again.

"Calm down—just calm down. This is the last one. I promise. The statistics so far say that water is most likely to win. Therefore, buying water is a shortcut to certain victory!"

I think that's because you almost never buy anything but water, Pops.

He scratches his white hair madly, his eyes bloodshot and breathing ragged, putting his finger on the button and pumping himself up. It's the old man who always comes in the morning in the group of three. His face seems incredibly sober and dignified.

Now, if he'd just keep his mouth shut... What a shame.

Until now, he was usually coming here with the old lady, but ever since implementing the slot system, he comes alone, early in the morning when nobody is around, tries the slots at least six times, then goes back home.

For what it's worth, the people who install the slot-machine function in vending machines can freely change the probabilities.

And as a piece of trivia, there's a rumor that if you want to hit the jackpot, you should buy unpopular items.

Even though it's a slot system, because of a law called the Premiums and Representations Act, there is a set limit to the value of premiums you can give as general prizes. The prizes are set at 2 percent of the total expected profit margin.

In other words, I can provide two prizes per every hundred purchases.

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that it all comes down to luck. If you really want to hit the jackpot, you'll have a certain chance if you pour all your money into everything the vending machine has in it, but... Oh, and I made my machine's probability 2 percent. If this were Japan, the setting would keep my conscience clear.

"Everything rests on this one coin! My gambling life comes down to this one coin!"

"What are you doing, honey...?"

The old man gives a start and turns around to see the old lady wagging her cane at him with a smile on her face. She finally found him out. It was inevitable—he's been sneaking out of the house early in the morning every day.

"I swear I thought you were back to your old habits, chasing after the girls' bottoms again...but to think it was *this* disease that relapsed."

"N-no, honey, that's not... L-look, I was just thinking of buying you a soup, too, and— *Ouch!*"

As the old man makes excuses, the old lady brings her cane down onto the crown of his head. It was a pretty merciless blow. Is he all right?

"Don't worry. If your skull splits, I'll heal you."

Right, the old lady can use the Blessing of Healing Light, can't she? Then I don't have to worry...do I?

"I swear. You haven't forgotten what today is, have you?"

“I know, I know... Just one more.”

“Hoooneeeey.”

The old lady twists the cane and pulls on it, and I glimpse the sharp glint of a blade. That was a sword cane? The old man is wholly retreating from this peacefully smiling, sword-cane-brandishing old lady.

She has a refinement to her features; I can easily imagine her being a beauty back in the day. The smile on her face *would* normally be attractive, but why do I feel a chill?

“P-please stop! Your skill is no joke. Fine—I’m sorry.”

“As long as you understand. Let’s be off now.”

The old lady starts dragging him away. He casts several reluctant glances back at me. Normally, it feels like the old lady does what the old man says, but maybe he’s actually a henpecked husband.

His slot-playing was more on edge than it usually is. From the way the lady talked, it seems like there’s an important event today. Maybe he didn’t want to go and came to me to escape reality.

If I could talk, I’d offer to listen to his complaints, but vending machines can only sell things.



I provide my usual products while thinking about the old man, and the next thing I know, the settlement is dyed in scarlet. Evening... We’re inside a dungeon, but the sun still rises and sets as if we aren’t. Plus, it’s starting to feel normal to me. Maybe I’m getting used to this alien world.

Lammis seems busy today; she’s been on autopilot near the Hunters Association all day.

I’ve been hearing a lot lately about eateries and stalls feeling provoked by my vending machine products and improving their own flavors. I think the settlement getting energized is a good thing, so I don’t stock edible items from evening until night.

The people of this world seem to have an early bedtime. Even at the latest, all the stores are closed by ten PM. After that, I’ve taken to stocking warm cup ramen, cans of oden, and lately, cans of curry udon.

There’s a mode that lets me heat up frozen foods, too, but said feature would take up half the vending machine when I used it, so

the problem is whether to use beverage mode for the other half or to put cup ramen there.

“Grandpa, Grandma, are you hungry? That square thing is the box that gives you lots of food, right? May isn’t hungry, but do you know if it’s good or not?”

I hear a young girl’s voice. Sounds like an indirect request. The stress she puts on not actually wanting to eat anything is kind of cute. A slightly precocious child, maybe?

“Oh, that’s right. Should we buy something? What do you want to eat, May?”

Hmm? Isn’t that the old man who frequents me? His irritable attitude from this morning is gone, replaced by a full smile as he holds the girl’s hand. Next to them are the old woman and a mature-looking lady with braids who appears to be in her twenties.

“I’m glad I took the plunge and came... I’m sorry my daughter is so undutiful.”

“For a parent, the most undutiful thing a child can do is to die before us. Anyway, you were born when we were rather old, so I think we spoiled you a lot, too.”

They step right into a heavy conversation. I know it’s rude of someone unrelated to listen in, but I can’t even plug my ears, so give me a break.

Is that woman their daughter? The old couple looks to be in their late sixties, so if their daughter is actually in her thirties, the age difference isn’t that strange.

“He was reluctant until the end, though. Deep down, he wanted to see you. He’s always so dishonest with himself.”

“I was prepared to be disowned when I eloped with him, so of course. And with someone Grandpa didn’t like. I couldn’t come back home so shamelessly after that...”

“You’re wrong—he was worried about you. Say all you want about this place, but it’s still a dungeon infested with monsters. We just had another monster attack recently, after all—our defenses are thin. And then you write to us saying you’re coming to visit whether we like it or not. He was worried sick.”

“Really?”

“Really. And because you left to come visit so suddenly, he was so stressed that his gambling addiction from so long ago came back,” explained the old woman, gazing at the old man and their granddaughter as they stood in front of me picking out something

to buy.

Ah, so that's why the old man has been playing the slots so much recently, searching for a way to beat it. It was to prepare for this day, to cling to straws, to try to hit the jackpot rumored to grant good luck for the day.

"Grandpa, what are these numbers for?"

"Ah, well. You see, when you buy something, they spin. If you get all the same number, you get another one for free. And if you win, everyone says you'll be lucky for the whole day."

"Wow, really? May wants to try! I'll win it for sure!"

The girl raises her hands and bounces up and down. The old man narrows his eyes and smiles, as though his granddaughter is giving off a brilliant light. I don't think I've ever seen him make such a kind face.

"Then give it a try. I'll put in the coin, so choose whatever one you want. By the way, I recommend the water."

"Okay, I'll try!"

I switch a few things around to put the orange juice on the bottommost row, where she's likely to reach.

She stands on her tiptoes, trying as hard as she can, and touches the button for the orange juice. As it drops into the compartment, the numbers on the slots begin to move.

"A seven and a seven! We just need one more, right?"

"Well, that's the part that never works. Even I've gotten this far."

"Seeeven, seeeven, seeeven, seeeven... It's a seven! We won!"

"Wh-what?!"

A fanfare plays, and the lights indicating warm and cool items begin to light up in sequence. The girl jumps for joy as the old man stares, at a loss for words.

He probably can't believe what he's seeing. He's gotten the jackpot only once after all the money he's poured in, and yet his granddaughter won on her first try.

"May, you have to choose soon, or else you won't have time to pick your free one."

"Then I'll pick this!"

The girl chooses the item next to the orange juice—the mineral water.

"This is for you, Grandpa!"

"You're giving it to me? Thank you. But if that day of good luck

only starts now, then it will be over soon. What a shame.”

“Huh? Why? I was really lucky all day, since I got to see Grandpa and Grandma! It’s not a shame!”

When the old man hears that, he looks up at the reddened skies. I have a full view of his face from my height, and I see a shining drop at the edge of his eye.

An old man, an old woman, their daughter, and their granddaughter. As they walk away in a line, their shadows stretch out far across the ground. They sway and wave, mingling with one another, until they eventually disappear.

I don’t think I need to say whether it was coincidence that May won the jackpot.

Hidden Vending Machine

With the settlement's reconstruction in full swing, Director Bear suddenly came to me with a request.

"Boxxo. I have heard you can use mimicry to blend in with your surroundings. Is this true?"

"Welcome."

I didn't know what he was up to, but there was no need to lie, so I answered truthfully. My words alone might not have convinced him, so despite being in my usual spot in front of the Hunters Association, I tried changing my colors to match the walls of the association headquarters.

The wall was behind me, but one of my features is Omnidirectional Vision, so I could see back there without a problem. Thanks to that, I should have been precisely replicating the wall, right down to its stains.

"Ho! Splendid. One would need to get pretty close to spot you. Boxxo, I have a request to make of you and that ability."

Director Bear's request was that they hide me in an area that has been seeing an outbreak of crimes due to all the people flowing in. I would then pick out the people committing them.

In order to investigate how good my mimicry ability is, he wants me to spend a day in front of the ruined wall of an abandoned house next to the Hunters Association headquarters without letting anyone find me.

I gave a friendly agreement. Director Bear went to Lammi and told her only that the association wanted to borrow me for the day, and he appeared to get her reluctant approval.

Then, in the middle of the night, they quietly carried me to a part of the wall they cut out beforehand and fit me into the hole. After that, I changed my body's colors to match the wall, which brings me to my current situation.

I have a good view of the headquarters from here. Just a change in angle from what I'm used to seeing makes the early morning feel incredibly fresh to me.

The normal morning group of four came around like they usually do, but, unable to find me, they left. Forgive me—I'm on a special mission today. It may not be much of an apology, but I'll change the slot probabilities for you next time.

Lammis would normally come outside and say good morning after they've left, but she already knows I won't be around today, so I guess she won't.

At least, I thought she wouldn't, but the door flies open with a bang, and Lammis appears in her pajamas. She's wearing a long-sleeved shirt so big it goes down to her knees; the mismatched size means the neck is too big, and it's loose over one shoulder, exposing it.

She has fur slippers on, and she's carrying a pillow under her arm and rubbing her bleary eyes. Lammis is borrowing a room in the Hunters Association HQ until they repair the inn, so I know why she's here, but why is she in her pajamas?

"Boxxo, where are you?" she drones, staring with lazy, half-open eyes at the spot I'm usually in.

She's literally still half-asleep. Did she forget I won't be around today?

"Boxxo, where aaare youuu?"

Oh, come on, don't wander around when you're half-asleep. You'll trip and fall. And don't go outside with your slippers on. You mustn't go out in such defenseless clothing. Go get changed. *Siiigh*. Just looking at how unsteady she is makes me anxious.

"Hey, Lammis, where are you going? The director said he was borrowing Boxxo today, didn't he?"

Munami, the inn's poster girl, has already changed into her apron, and she grabs Lammis by the collar, trying to stop her. But there's no stopping the girl with incredible Might. Munami just gets dragged along.

"Fwah? Oh, Munami, morning..."

"Don't *morning* me. Go wash your face and wake yourself up."

"Okaaay. I'll be right back..."

She holds her pillow up in the air, waves it around, and disappears into the building. Munami, watching, gives a dry grin and waves back.

"I swear, seriously...just when I thought that sense of tension was gone, now she's too slack. But it's still a lot better than before. This must be thanks to Boxxo, too," she says to herself, withdrawing back to her room.

She said something interesting there. My impression of Lammis is that she's a girl who is always smiling and full of energy, but was she different before she met me? Come to think of it, she was depressed when we first met.

But after the king-frog-fiend hunt, she seemed to regain her confidence, and she's been enjoying the reconstruction work and her training ever since. I don't know what she was like before, but if she's happy now, that's all that matters.

"I'm back! I'm awake! Good morning."

The usual plate-fitted boots and low-rise shorts. With her leather armor on, which she almost never removes, even inside the settlement, Lammis appears energetically at the entrance.

Her sleepy demeanor wasn't bad, but her energetic personality suits her far better. I can say for certain that her biggest charm is that smile.

"Yes, yes, good morning. What are you doing today, Lammis? Would you mind helping with the inn's reconstruction like you always do?"

"Sorry! I don't know when Boxxo will come back, so I'm going to help out around the Hunters Association."

"Oh, I guess that's that, then. Don't bother Director Bear too much, all right?"

Munami waves her hand a little and heads for the inn site, and Lammis vigorously waves back at her.

She'll be working around here today? I'll have to be careful that she doesn't find me.

"Okay! Time to go ask the director if he has work for me!"

"You needn't go far."

"Whoa! Director, when did you get here?!"

Yes, when *did* you get there? How can he conceal himself so thoroughly in spite of his giant stature? He's right behind Lammis, but I didn't notice him, either, until right before he said something.

"Concealing my presence is a boon. Lammis, you should focus on your training."

"Presence...? Oh, Master said presence was really important."

I wonder what kind of person this master of hers is that she

talks about sometimes. I don't know their gender, only that they're a very talented hunter. If she'd trained under that master for a little longer, she'd probably be able to control her Might better, too. A real shame.

"They must have been a good master. Anyway, Lammis, am I correct in thinking you desire work near the Hunters Association today?"

"Yup, yup. I want to make sure I'm here to greet Boxxo whenever he comes back."

What a good kid. I can say for certain that meeting her is the greatest stroke of fortune I've had since coming to this world. If not for our meeting, I'd probably be nothing more than a metal box on a lakeside with no points to speak of.

"Hmm. Boxxo is a lucky fellow. Or rather, a lucky box."

Director Bear is right. I'm the luckiest vending machine in the world.

"Let's see. In a little while, the belongings of the association HQ residents are scheduled to arrive. Could you help us carry them?"

"You can leave the physical labor to me!"

She gives him a thumbs-up and a big smile.

Lammis isn't good at the more delicate work, but when it comes to physical labor, she's second to none. When she was working at the inn, she managed the amazing feat of breaking dozens of plates all at one time, but transporting foodstuffs and other large goods is right up her alley.

"Do a good job."

Director Bear pulls back inside. Lammis sits next to the door and sways left and right. It looks like she's just going to wait like this, but every once in a while, she shoots a glance somewhere else with a tinge of loneliness on her face.

She's looking at the spot I'm usually in, after all... Suddenly, I can't help wondering why she's so attached to me.

I met her on the lakeside. Near starvation, she bought something from me and survived. She interpreted that as a life debt, and she takes care of me in all kinds of ways. I'm thankful for it, but at the moment, I still don't know why she's excessively attentive to me.

"Ah, this should be good. Young lady, we brought the cargo—could you call a worker for us?"

A horned boar—a buar—is carrying a cart full of baggage. The

buar is a heavy eater, but with its durability and might, it's prized in the same way a cart-pulling horse might be.

When I first saw one, it was a little scary, but recently, I've started to think of them as cute.

"Wait here a moment, mister. I'll go call a worker!"

Lammis bursts into the headquarters and bursts right back out. Carrying a female worker under her arm.

"U-um, would you mind letting me down?"

"Sorry, sorry."

She seems to have a surplus of excitement today. She's normally a little calmer than this.

She releases the worker, who then talks to the coachman about something. Lammis hangs out nearby.

"Lammis, could you bring the things in this cart up to the second floor and put them in front of the room to the left at the end?"

"Okay, leave it to me!"

She pounds her chest, and did I just see it bounce even though she has leather armor on? The armor's material—is it soft? I'm only a little curious.

The coachman watches as Lammis easily lifts, with one hand, a rather large chest of drawers from the pile on the cart, his eyes going so wide with surprise that they look like they'll fall out.

"Maybe I'll take this bed up, too."

With a chest of drawers on her left shoulder and a bed on her right, Lammis disappears into the open entrance to the association headquarters. The association's doors are all double doors and giant, so she got through without a problem. I was on pins and needles, expecting her to run into something.

"Shoot! That young lady is a lot stronger than she looks."

"Yes. I believe she might be the strongest one in Clearflow Lake. The director has mentioned her being a promising newcomer."

Just listening to the worker and the coachman talking is making me all warm and fluffy. I'm as happy about Lammis being praised as if it were me.

Director Bear seems to have held Lammis in high esteem for quite some time, but the other hunters' opinions of her are subpar at best. Her Might is too much for her, and it's apparently caused her to make frequent errors in the past.

Now, lugging me around gives her the perfect amount of

weight, and she's been happy about her movements feeling more natural than before. You never know when things will take a turn for the better.

While reflecting with deep emotion on her growth, I hear a loud crash and a familiar cry from inside the headquarters: "Huh? Ahhhhh!"

I sigh as I watch the female worker run inside. "Too bad."

Oops. Nobody heard that, right? I've just been casually watching things like some gawker in an audience and I let my reaction slip accidentally. I glance around, but nobody is nearby, so I exhale in relief. Carefully this time, so my voice doesn't come out.

After that, I watch the association entrance for a while, but Lammis and the female worker haven't come out yet. Other than several people from the settlement clearly looking for the vending machine before leaving in disappointment, nothing has changed.

Though my absence is a bit inconsiderate to my customers, seeing as they couldn't buy anything, they really make me feel like I'm needed, which makes me want to grin. Whoops, better make sure the cool items don't warm up.

"Aaaahhh, there I go again..."

Lammis heaves a sigh and trudges out of the entrance, shoulders drooping.

The sound before must have been Lammis, like I thought. Her Might gets in the way of her daily life, and she ends up breaking things a lot.

I believe she owns cooking utensils, but they're apparently special ones made of an alloy harder than iron. The fine articles were courtesy of her friend Hulemy, and Lammis has bragged before about them being her precious treasures.

At the time, her sincere, carefree, happy smile as she clutched the cooking equipment left an impression on me. For her, it's not only the specially made equipment—her friend Hulemy holds a lot of weight for her, too.

She says we'll be able to meet her one day, which I'm looking forward to. I wonder what kind of person she is. She's well suited for Lammis, so maybe she has a similar personality.

How about an older character, one a little taller and more urbane, with an air of acceptance and a perfect body? That's not to say I'm projecting my own desires here.

"They don't want me carrying their things, so now what...? I

guess I'm better off clearing rubble after all."

Yep, you are. Personally, I find her ditzzy nature to be cute, but her incredible strength is no joke. Pitted against someone without near-magical restorative abilities or toughness, it could sometimes lead to significant injuries.

Oh—is that why she can act so innocently when I'm with her? A vending machine is incomparably tougher than a human body, and I can repair myself if I'm damaged. Maybe I'm the ideal partner for her.

"I'll go ask the director where would be good to clear debris."

She slaps herself in the cheeks with her palms to get herself going, then rushes into the building to find Director Bear.

"Okay, I'll go get rid of the rubble over there!"

The doors slam open and Lammis bursts back out. She gets started removing the rubble from a home that was crushed by the double serpent in front of the Hunters Association headquarters.

She tugs out a remaining pillar from the demolished house like she's yanking out a weed. Then she reaches under the foundation and tears it from the ground all too easily.

Her Might amazes me like always. Thanks to that power, I am able to fully enjoy my life in this other world. I have nothing but gratitude for the divine Blessing that gave her this ability.

Like a fish back in water, Lammis quickly amasses a pile of rubble in the handcart, and once she has a nice heap, she runs off with it in tow toward the debris dump site.

Her efforts would make heavy equipment pale in the face. Considering her personality, it's ironic that her forte is destruction.

"Oh, is Boxxo not here?"

A new visitor? It's Shirley, walking with her hips swaying as if to show off her generous curves. The lady running the night business.

Behaving sexily as usual, I see. I mean, if a lady with a smoking-hot figure walked by in a dress with a front slit down to her waist that almost fully exposes her breasts, you'd look, too.

The men in the settlement are looking at her from a distance. Several also pass behind her, clearly pretending to be simply passing by but getting a nice, close look at her down their noses.

"Uwoooooaahhhhh... Huh? Hi, Shirley!"

The object approaching with dust in its wake—pushing a handcart and roaring toward us—must be Lammis.

“Oh, hello, Lammis. It’s been a while.”

“You’re pretty as usual, Shirley. I want to grow up and look more like an adult soon.”

“Hee-hee. You don’t need to rush it. Lammis, you’ll become such a pretty woman that I won’t even come close. I guarantee it.”

“Really? Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha.”

Shirley watches kindly as Lammis blushes and scratches her head. A lot about Shirley and Lammis are polar opposites, so you’d think they normally wouldn’t match, but that isn’t the case. Both are friendly and aren’t the type to discriminate, so they actually get along quite well.

“I know. Once you get a little older, I’ll teach you a technique that’s sure to soften up even the squarest men.”

“Wait, really?! Any kind of square person? You mean it?!”

Shirley’s eyes slant downward when she sees Lammis approach, breathing heavily. Shirley seems to have noticed something from how Lammis latched on to that more than she thought. Hmm. So Lammis likes serious people... It’s sort of surprising, but it also sort of makes sense.

“Oh my. Is there someone you’re interested in?”

“It’s a secret! But I wonder if sex appeal will work.”

When I see her clasp her hands in front of her chest and go red in the face, I hear a strange echo from within my vending machine body.

Why, Lammis has someone she likes...? Dad will not allow this! If anyone lays a finger on my adorable daughter, I will deliver punishment through hot cola and cold canned ramen.

“But I think being your usual, natural self is a better choice than trying to win him with sex appeal.”

“You...you think so? But I want to be a little calmer when I’m grown-up.”

“Everyone calms down when they get older. I think you should treasure the charm you have now, since you’ll only have it when you’re young. You can bother with love tactics when you’re older. For now, you should do your best to be yourself.”

“Okay. Thanks, Shirley!”

I’ve been listening in out of interest, but unfortunately, Shirley leaves without pursuing the topic of Lammis’s crush any further.

In any case, Shirley’s response was exactly what I’d expect an experienced adult to give. She has unfathomable charm on the

inside as well as the outside. I should be embarrassed for having a slanted view of her since she works the night business.

“She’s just so pretty. I wonder if I’ll change if I wear a dress like that, too.”

I try imagining Lammis wearing an evening dress as exposing as that one. Her breasts are no smaller, so it would probably seem natural. The legs coming out the bottom would have a healthy beauty to them, though, rather than sexiness.

To be honest, I think it’s still a little early for her. And if she wore something like that, I’d start to worry.

“Everyone’s coming to see Boxxo... He sure is popular.”

She looks like she’s pouting a little. I wonder why. I think I heard her say something, but her voice was too quiet for me to make out most of it.

Lammis sits on the wall of the former house and swings her legs. She was having a good time removing the debris before, but now, she’s spacing out as though she’s exhausted.

“Oh, the magic box isn’t here. And I came all this way to buy something.”

That impudent-sounding voice— Suori, the little girl with light-brown twin-tails and the pretty outfit that stands out in the settlement. Her eyes are sharp, and she must be unhappy with something, because I only ever see her with her arms folded in irritation.

Well, that was my initial impression of Suori. Recently, she’s been different. She’s still got a bad mouth, but she’s become a bit meeker, and she smiles like a little kid should when she drinks orange juice.

“Mgh! I wanted to drink some urengi juice... Stupid Boxxo! Stupid, stupid!”

As though offended by my impertinence, she starts stomping on the ground. A man and woman in black clothing are keeping an eye on her from a distance. It looks like those two are her escorts today; they’re staying hidden behind a house and on the second floor of the Hunters Association headquarters.

I’ve been thinking—wouldn’t it be less suspicious if they wore the same clothes as the others living here instead of those black outfits? Could it be part of their dress code?

“Hey, Suori, don’t call Boxxo stupid. Hup, ho!”

Lammis leaps from the wall and lands gracefully in front of

Suori. They were a good sixteen feet apart—her physical abilities continue to impress.

“Hmph. You were here this whole time, booby monster.”

“I thought I told you before that my name is Lammis.”

Oh, do they not get along? They’re glaring at each other with narrowed eyes. This is the first time I’ve really seen them interact. Do they even know each other?

“By the way, Lammaries, have you given any thought to my proposal?”

“It’s Lammis! And I don’t care how much money you have. I’m not handing over Boxxo.”

“Oh, well. If you just nod your head, you’ll get enough money that it will last three generations and still won’t run out.”

“I can’t exchange Boxxo for money. Besides, I told you he doesn’t belong to me, right?”

I had no idea Suori wanted to buy me from Lammis. That’s the sort of thing you’d expect would go through me first...but it’s not possible for us to talk, I guess. Besides, in the dungeon, whoever finds a magic item has the right to it. I suppose this is the proper way to go about it.

“Don’t you think you’re restricting Boxxo too much? Instead of constantly being with an undersized, unattractive girl, he would be much happier to spend his time elegantly in my fabulous mansion, wouldn’t he?”

“Undersized, unattractive...?! I don’t want to hear that from *you*, Suori.”

Lammis folds her arms, purposely accentuating her ample bosom. Suori’s expression goes demonic. I can almost hear the menacing rumble around her as she glares at Lammis’s chest with a bloodcurdling look.

I didn’t expect to see Lammis arguing with such a young kid.

“Grrrrr! You’re so frustrating! But I’m still growing! And you can expect a lot from me in the future, because my mother has bigger ones than yours!” she declares, sticking out her chest. I think height is largely affected by genetics, but what about breast size? I’m a man, so I never cared about things like that.

“How pitiful, Lady Suori...”

Whoa. That startled me. One of the black-suited bodyguards was nearby? He doesn’t seem to have noticed me; he’s wiping his brow with a handkerchief as he watches their exchange.

“She doesn’t know her mother’s prolific mounds are stuffed...”

Oh, okay. I see. There’s always time for mutations and recessive genes, so don’t give up yet.

Still, why does this black-clothed man know that Suori’s mother pads her chest? That seems like the bigger issue.

“W-well, fine then. Lammaries, will you allow me to ask a question?”

“I’ll think about it if you call me my actual name.”

“Ugh, all right...Lammis. I have a question about Boxxo. It isn’t just a magic item, is it? How on earth does it work?”

“Hmm... About that... I don’t know either, really. He understands what I say, and he even answers. I don’t think Boxxo is any different from a person.”

Is that how she’s been thinking of me? She does treat me the same way she treats other people, but I thought she was only doing it because she’s a nice person.



I see... Thanks, Lammis. That might be the nicest thing I've heard since coming to this world.

"I suppose you have no intent of telling me. Well, that's fine. I'll spare neither time nor money to make you surrender Boxxo. I'll have to convince you thoroughly of the benefits of being with me. That is my privilege as a wealthy and young person."

Lammis is young, too, but certainly not as young as Suori. But no matter how much time or money she pours into me, I don't think my feelings will ever change.

The most relaxing place for me right now is on Lammis's back, after all. Unless she decides to leave me first, I'll never give that up.

"Anyway! Boxxo isn't here today, so go home already."

"Hmph! I'll be back another day. I'll leave Boxxo with you until then, so make sure to polish him up nice and clean. Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

Suori leaves after getting the last word in. Lammis waves after her, too. Despite the previous argument, a smile is on her lips.

Maybe she was just dealing with Suori, and she didn't hate her or anything.

"Suori sure is fun to tease. She used to be much more curt, but she seems friendlier lately. Maybe it's the Boxxo effect... Ugh. Isn't Boxxo back yet?"

It's evening now, and my promise with Director Bear lasts until midnight. There's more time left, but it pains my heart to see Lammis hanging her lonesome head like that. It makes me want to give her some warm milk tea right this instant.

"I wonder what Boxxo is up to."

Gazing at the side of Lammis's face as she sighs and looks up at the sky, I can't bear it anymore, and—

"Thank you."

—I give my usual greeting and turn off my mimicry.

She must have heard the voice, because her face immediately brightens and she looks around, and then upon finding me, she charges, kicking up dust in her wake.

"Boxxo, how long have you been there?!"

She grinds to a halt, her feet digging into the ground, and stops in front of me. Then, she chops me on either side with the bridge of her hands to grab me. You're making this a crazy reunion, Lammis.

It's a bit early, but I just couldn't leave her alone any longer.

"You should have said something sooner. So many things happened today. Do you want to hear, Boxxo?"

Of course. I know everything that happened, but I want to hear it directly from her. I already know my answer.

"Welcome."

The Kidnapping

Ah, hello there. It's the vending machine. Bestselling and now in transit.

I'm currently being knocked around a buar-pulled cart—which is fine, in and of itself, but the problem is I don't know where the cart is.

The cart I'm on doesn't have a covering, which gives me a clear view of the surrounding area. We're traveling through plains overgrown with long weeds, and occasionally a deerlike creature with three horns appears. It seems to be an animal rather than a monster. I can't tell the difference between animals and monsters, but apparently, there's a clear distinction.

As for what else I can see... Two men are sitting in the carriage seat. They're likely forty or so. They have unremarkable faces.

And another buar cart is following behind this one. A band of six people who appear to be hunters are riding on it. They're the ones who struggled to get me into the cart.

I know it's far too late now, but I should have been a little more suspicious.

They came early this morning, lined up in front of me, and said this:

"The Hunters Association's director requested that repairs and reinforcements of areas near the walls start in earnest today. He told us he wanted you to do your sales there for a while, Boxxo."

At the time, I was in the middle of considering my abilities and mulling over what I should stock next. I gave my ready consent with a "Welcome" and sank back into the sea of my thoughts.

In the past, either Director Bear would come tell me personally, or Lammis would tell me on his behalf. When these hunters came instead, I figured that even the director found some things trivial

enough to send only messengers.

And that was how the six of them loaded me into the cart while I was none the wiser. That was where I made another grave mistake. You know how when you're riding in a car, and the sunlight shining in makes you want to go to sleep? I don't technically have to sleep, but sometimes I want to because of my habits from when I was human.

The shaking of the cart and rolling of the wheels had a lullaby effect on me, and so I passed out.

And that's how I got here. This means I've been kidnapped, doesn't it? They must be after the gold coins stowed inside me, or maybe my value as a whole.

I feel no danger whatsoever to my life, but the thing that worries me most is not being able to move of my own volition. Even if I somehow manage to escape them here, I have no way of returning to the settlement. This stratum is massive, so if I end up alone on the way to wherever we're going, it could easily be years before anyone stumbles across me. Of course, I'd probably run out of points first.

For now, I record the criminals' faces using the vending machine surveillance camera I bought earlier as a crime-prevention measure. With this feature, I can replay the video I record whenever I want, so I'll never forget what they look like.

Two of them, at least, are familiar faces. They've been buying from me a lot lately, and I remember a grim determination in their gazes compared to other people.

And then, hmm... Oh, he's here, too. The low-life villain Gugoye is watching me with a smirk on his face. Looking like the archetypal small fry, as always.

Either he was the one who brought this dissolute band together, or they were all allied to begin with. If so, will they eventually put me down somewhere and disassemble me? I'm pretty sure Gugoye doesn't know about my Force Field. I don't think I've shown it to anyone save for Lammis and Captain Kerioyl.

In that case, I'll hold on to my Force Field as a trump card. Still, the more distance we put between us and the settlement, the less of a chance anyone has of finding me. Wh-what should I do? I'm starting to freak out.

O-okay. I'll go over my abilities. Maybe that will calm me

down.

[Vending Machine: Boxxo]

DUR 100/100

TGH 10

STR 0

SPD 0

DEX 0

MAG 0

PT 11,346

{Features} Cold Retention, Heat Retention,
Omnidirectional Vision, Hot-Water
Dispenser (Cup Ramen Mode), Two-Liter
Support, Candy-Roll Vending, Paint Change,
Boxed-Item Support, Vending Machine
Surveillance Camera
{Blessings} Force Field

For a vending machine, I must say I'm pretty high-spec, but I can't function properly in another world with just these sorts of abilities.

The biggest factor that created this situation was my giddiness at crossing the ten-thousand-point barrier, but it's not all bad. With this many points, I can maintain Force Field for a long time. I'll take that as a silver lining. If I need to, I can repair myself several times, too.

Calm down, calm down. They're not going to scrap you right away. Force Field consumes 1 point per second, so 60 in a minute. But that's 3,600 in an hour... Wait, this isn't good...

We rapidly pull farther away from the settlement while I consider my options; we're almost at the two-hour mark since I woke up.

"Hey! We're taking a break," shouts one of the men in the coachman's seat before stopping the cart.

The buar cart following us stops as well, then everyone clambers off it. And then they surround me. Do they really think I'm just going to give them their lunch?

"All right, time to eat. Hey, Boxxo. If you've got a brain in there, I'm sure you know what situation you're in."

The low-life villain is getting full of himself, since he's got friends around now. He must be remembering his earlier humiliation as he breaks out into vulgar laughter and flashes a blade.

"You're going to give us the food and drink we want for free. I'm sure even an iron box like you knows what'll happen if you don't."

"Too bad," I answer immediately. I know exactly what will result from provoking him right now, but I can't help myself.

As expected, blood rushes to Gugoye's face, turning it bright red. He likely doesn't know the meaning of the word *patience*.

"Bastard! I'll break you!"

He thrusts his short sword at the glass, but it only leaves a small scratch on the surface.

[1 damage. Durability decreased by 1.]

Just one damage? He's weaker than I thought. The frog people hurt a lot more than him. Not learning his lesson, he damages me several more times, but I take only five points of damage total.

"Gugoye, stop. We're after what's inside, but I told you the thing has value as a whole, remember? Don't damage it for no reason."

"Y-yes, sir. Sorry... Keh. You live another day."

The perfect parting shot for a man like him. The man who stopped him is a good deal larger than all the others nearby. His physique, at least, is very similar to Gocguy's, the man who traveled with the money-exchanging lady.

The huge blade scar on his forehead only adds to his intimidation. He has no eyebrow hair or hair on his head; I can't tell if they were shaved or if he was born like that. If not for his grandiose beard, he might look a lot like Karios the gatekeeper.

"And you—you don't want us to break you. I think it would be in your best interest to do what we say."

The large man seems more logical than Gugoye. He's right—defying them won't do me any good. The answer is to pretend to obey them while getting a clear picture of the situation.

"You're Too bad."

Just kidding. Why should I have to listen to what the guys who kidnapped me have to say? If Lammis were here, she'd absolutely refuse. I want to stay with her in the future, so I have no intention of living in a way that brings shame upon myself.

“You don’t seem to understand your position here. Hey, Gugoye. You said this thing can fix its own damaged parts, right?”

“Yes, sir, it can. It was really beaten up during the hunting expedition, but it made itself go right back to normal.”

“I see. All right, everyone. Make the thing understand with force—just don’t break it.”

If I could feel pain, this would be a pretty terrifying situation. But these big, burly men are circling a vending machine, threatening it... This is some advanced comedy.

Their idea that I’ll do what they say if they recklessly hurt me, without knowing anything about me, is too easy. They must not realize how stupidly they’re behaving against a metal box.

“This is your last chance to apologize. Now that the boss gave the word, you’d better prepare yourself, because we ain’t having any mercy.”

Their boss, eh? If he’s the top of the chain, are all the rest of them his henchmen? Anyway, even though that tidbit lets me calmly understand the situation, I don’t have a way of asking them that.

[3 damage. Durability decreased by 3.]

[2 damage. Durability decreased by 2.]

They’re really going at it with those weapons. If this goes on, I’ll eventually break down. But I want to keep my Force Field hidden until the last possible moment. If I repair now, it’ll probably spur them to keep attacking me. What should I do? I think the correct answer is to let them get me to a near-broken state to make them worry...but I can’t take this lying down.

I don’t have enough points for a Blessing. Nothing in the features list stands out, either. Can’t I do anything else? My durability keeps going down, and I can’t counter their attacks. If I was a little tougher, I might be able to get away with no damage, too.

[Spend 1,000 points to increase toughness by 10?]

What? Words came up while I was looking at the toughness stat. Wait, I can upgrade my stats using points, too?!

A thousand points is fairly painful, but if I increase my toughness, I can decrease the damage I’m taking now. It’s worth giving it a try—let’s boost it.

[Toughness increased to 20.]

It doesn’t feel like anything happened, but I must be harder

now. I'll know if that's true one way or the other in a moment.

[0 damage. Durability decreased by 0.]

Great, I nullified their damage. Now, if I leave my durability in its decreased state, my visible damage will remain, and they'll mistakenly believe their attacks are having an effect.

Now to wait for them to tire themselves out.

The Kidnappers

Ignoring the men as they continue to pummel, their shoulders heaving up and down with their breathing, I go over my stats.

If I was able to increase my toughness, then can I raise my other stats, too? Let's try durability first.

[Spend 1,000 points to increase durability by 10?]

I can upgrade my durability? Well, considering how many points I need to use, it doesn't seem that efficient. If it were 100, I'd raise it without a second thought. What about the others?

[Spend 10,000 points to increase strength by 10?]

[Spend 10,000 points to increase speed by 10?]

[Spend 10,000 points to increase dexterity by 10?]

There's an extra digit there... Strength, speed, and dexterity aren't stats a vending machine needs, and I don't plan on increasing them, but that's absurdly expensive.

If I increased my strength or speed, I wonder if I'd be able to walk around by shaking the vending machine back and forth. That would be pretty funny, if possible.

I can't increase my magic stat no matter what, though. It looks like we won't be seeing the birth of a magical vending machine. That's too bad.

"All right, let's leave it at that."

"Yes, sir."

Oh, they're finished. I raised my toughness once my durability had gone down about thirty points, so I must look pretty beaten up.

"Hey, the thing isn't repairing."

"B-but that can't be. It fixed itself before. I saw it with my own eyes! H-heh, you bastard, fix the damage already!"

I refuse. I'm going to keep pretending to be broken-down now. I don't have the slightest desire to give them any drinks... Actually, wait, I changed my mind. I'll give them some.

“Gugoyle, you know what happens if this thing is broken, right?”

“Y-yes, sir! H-hey, you crappy box, fix yourself already! I know you’re just pretending you can’t move!”

Oh, now he’s panicking. I’ll be keeping the damage, but don’t you worry—I’ll give you a drink.

“B-boss! An item fell out! L-look, it’s not broken!”

I drop enough drinks for everyone, and they happily pick them up. You should be thanking me for my kindness.

“Well, fine. For now, just give me one. I don’t care which.”

Everyone gets a drink. Exhausted after “beating me up,” the men open their caps in unison and down the liquid inside.

“Blech!”

“Gah, ugh, what is this?!”

“This is awful!”

How do you like the taste of my top ten worst juices? I’ve bought every new product I’ve ever seen in a vending machine, and if I get lucky some of the time, I obviously pull short straws as well.

There are actually a lot of drinks that are so unbelievably terrible that their manufacturers must not have any taste buds. One of the lighter drinks is a carbonated beverage that tastes like vegetables covered in mayonnaise; another is a carbonated beverage with the taste of strong-smelling seasonings used in Japanese cooking... Both come from the same company.

There is a fair number of other ridiculously absurd combinations. It just goes to show how deep the world of beverage manufacturing can be.

“Think it’s broken after all?”

“Whatever. We’ll figure out what to do once we get back to the hideout. If worse comes to worst and it is busted... Gugoyle, don’t think you’re getting out of this unharmed.”

“Y-yes, sir.”

Gugoyle goes so white in the face after his boss’s threat that he looks like he’s about to faint. I have no sympathy for him, though, so I don’t care. He’s the one who told them about me in the first place; it’s his fault I’m here.

They must believe attacking me further really will break me, because they handle me rather delicately after that. I’m glad things have eased up, but what do I do now? I can’t think of any noteworthy plans. I guess I’ll just have to be flexible and respond to

situations when they come up. If things get really bad, I'll fight back with my Force Field.



After about two hours without quarrel or item purchasing, we arrive at our destination.

As the path transitions from dirt to slightly better-maintained gravel, I see a man-made building, an unnatural sight in this place abounding with nature. The fortress has big holes in its walls, every part of it on the verge of rotting away and collapsing. It's fairly small compared to the Hunters Association HQ, but it was probably once a full-fledged fortress.

It looks as though it's been left alone for months, with ivy crawling about here and there. Seems like a fun place—if I came here for ruins exploration.

“Bring it inside. Just give it to her to check out.”

“Right, sir, but I don't think it'll listen to what we say.”

“If it doesn't, then your body will find it's missing its head.”

“Eek! Y-yes, sir!”

I'm demoting the low-life villain to a low-life peon. Anyway, I wonder who they're talking about. They don't seem to trust one another, despite being allies.

That's what I thought about as the six men laid me, a vending machine, on its side and carried me away. It takes six of them just to have a chance at moving me, which really puts Lammis's extraordinary ability into perspective.

We pass through double doors, the hinges of which look like they would fly off if you gave it a firm hit, and we steal into the beat-up fortress. It's tidier inside than I thought. A few sets of long tables and chairs, which look clearly homemade, inhabit the large, hall-like area we're in.

The big sofa against the wall looks timeworn but is of decent quality. No piles of dust litter the floor; someone must sweep it diligently. For people who look like evil octopi, they seem to have a penchant for cleanliness.

We pass through the hall, and just as I think we're going up the stairs, we instead head toward a metal door in the right-hand corner. The door creaks open, revealing a dark staircase leading down.

They carry me down like a palanquin, and then we go deeper still to find two men—probably guards—wearing metal armor and protecting a bolted door. The guard situation makes it seem like they're holding a terrible criminal inside.

"She behaving?"

"We gave her a magic item, and she suddenly quieted down. She's clacking around with something in there now."

"I don't understand that woman. Anyway, I don't think she'll cause a fuss when we give her this."

I'm listening to the villains converse, but now I know even less about the person behind this door.

The guards lift the bolt across the door, and as they open it, they keep their spears at the ready. Is there some kind of magic-item-loving wild animal in there, or what?

"Hey! We brought a toy we thought you'd like. Analyze this, and if it's broken, get it back to normal."

"What was that? Who said you bastards could talk to me like that? You're trash—less than trash, so don't give me orders!"

A menacing voice fills the room. This seems to discourage the low-life peon, and he averts his eyes as they put me in a corner of the room.

"H-here's some details. Give them a good read."

"Heh. Didn't your mother ever tell you to look at a person's eyes when talking to them? Or are you scared or something? Scared of a weak little girl like me?"

The lady drawls on like an angry street punk. I stare hard at her. For a woman, she's fairly tall—my height, or only a little shorter.

Her long hair is the hue of milk tea, and it's tied behind her, but probably only because it gets in the way. Several clumps of hair are sticking out.

She's staring at me dubiously with her thin, narrowed eyes. Her light-pink lips mutter a quick curse—she seems ready to spit on the floor.

She's wearing clothes that were probably white to begin with, but now they're a mess of brown and black, clinging to her body. I think for a moment she's wearing a black coat on top of it, but on closer inspection, it might be a white cloak stained black. The front of it is open, and since her clothing is tight to her body, you can see her entire figure.

Her chest is so flat I do a double take. Almost nothing whatsoever.

I get it. Tall, a scary face, and a flat chest. The exact opposite of Lammis.

"The hell? They left this thing here and ran away. Guess that's the only thing they're good at. Now, what's this? He said something about details."

Annoyed, she looks at the sheaf of papers on the ground, skimming through it. This bad-mouthed woman seems the sort of person I shouldn't get involved with too deeply. I can't help feeling like I should continue pretending to be a harmless hunk of metal.

"Really? You're a magic item with a mind of its own, eh? That true?"

Is that written in the papers? I don't think playing dumb will get me far here. She may have a bad mouth, but it seems like she's not friends with the others. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, or so they say. Hmm. I'm not sure how to respond.

"Oh, you think I'm one of them, do you? They kidnapped me and locked me up here. I'm a victim. I may not look like much, but I'm actually a famous magic-item engineer. I think they brought you here so I could investigate you."

If that's true, then that means they're treating her like this because of me. It would be incredibly cowardly of me to keep up this "I'm just a vending machine" charade.

"Welcome."

"You really can talk! Whoa. I've never seen a magic item that understands words before. I guess one good thing came of getting captured."

Her narrow eyes open wide, and her languid attitude from before dissipates as she starts breathing heavily, observing every last part of me.

"Mind if I ask some questions?"

"Welcome."

"It says here that means yes. Then, as for my question... Wait, I guess I should introduce myself first. It's only polite. My name is Hulemy."

Wait, I've heard that name before. Who'd have thought I'd meet her here before even Lammis. This must be the magic-item-engineer friend Lammis wanted me to meet.



The Magic-Item Engineer Hulemy

“I took a quick look through this reference. Is it true you can communicate your intent by saying ‘Welcome’ and ‘Too bad?’”

“Welcome.”

“I see. I’ve never heard of anyone creating a magic item with a human level of intelligence. But did you know that it’s not actually rare to find weapons and armor that can understand human language and speak?”

“Too bad.”

I guess when she explains things, she gives off a more intellectual vibe, and her tone softens a bit.

“They come up in the historical record a lot. They were once called the Wise Weapons. But only the weapon’s owner or specific people could hear its voice, and others would think they were crazy people who talked to themselves. Nobody knows who made the Wise Weapons, and it’s one of the reasons the whole story isn’t very reliable.”

I’ve come across weapons described like that in video games and novels before. Does this mean the same sorts of weapons and armor exist in this world?

“I’m a magic-item engineer, too, though not much of one. I’ve done a bunch of experiments to see if I can get a magic item to have intelligence, but...I came to the conclusion that it’s impossible with our current level of technology. So then I changed how I thought about it. What if a human soul could inhabit one, rather than an artificial life-form somebody created?”

What? She came to that conclusion by herself? Doesn’t this mean she’ll realize I’m self-aware? Hopeful of the possibility, I focus on the conversation.

“Sealing souls is something people have been doing with magic and Blessings for a long time. The basic ones involve bringing a

dead person's soul into a body temporarily, or using heretical magic to control dead corpses using someone's soul temporarily. Hmm, oh, sorry, I need some water..."

She's trying to pour water from a cheap-looking, rusted jug into a cup. You don't have to do that—I'll treat you. What should I choose? Maybe the warm milk tea, the same color as her hair. We're underground, so it's a little chilly. Something warm would be good.

"Hmm? What was that? Oh, is this one of your products? Can I have it?"

"Welcome."

"Oh, all right. Thanks... Mmm, aaahhh! That sweetness hits the spot. I was getting burned-out. And it's the perfect warmth, too. You're pretty good, you know that?"

Wow, when her expression softens, she gives off a whole different impression. She smiles like a pure, innocent girl.

"Thanks—that's a relief. Anyway, it says here your name is Boxxo. Is that correct?"

"Welcome."

"All right then, Boxxo. Would you happen to be a magic item with a human soul inside it?"

I never thought I'd see the day when someone asked me that. I thought I was lucky enough just to have Lammis, someone I could communicate with even though I can barely talk. Now someone has even figured out what I actually am.

"Welcome," I answer, at a louder volume to make my feelings clear.

"I knew it! I guess my powers of insight work after all! I see, I see. Pleased to meet you, Boxxo."

"Thank you."

I'm so happy. It must be a trick of fate that Lammis's friend was the one to realize this. But everyone she's close with is generally a good person. I thought it was a coincidence, but if that's the power of her charm at work, maybe this meeting was inevitable.

"I'm going to suggest several things based on the information in these documents, so if I'm wrong about something, speak up. The magic item Boxxo has a master."

"Too bad." Vending machines don't have owners. God might qualify, but that's a stretch.

"Oh, you don't? Then do you remember when you were a

human?”

“Welcome.”

“Really? Huh. I see. This is my biggest question. Nobody refills your items, but you never run out. I’m thinking you’re pulling from extra-dimensional storage using spatial magic or some kind of special ability. Well?”

In a way, she’s right, but she’s not completely correct. I don’t understand how I work at all myself.

“Welcome Too bad.”

“That’s not completely wrong, then. Does that mean it has to do with your product prices? Without a master, a magic item would have no means of using the money it collects. If your only purpose is to sell goods, you would be able to lower the prices more. But they’re set a little high, in my opinion. In other words, money serves an important purpose for Boxxo.”

“Welcome Welcome.”

Hulemy is amazing. Lammis makes accurate guesses with her good heart and intuition, but Hulemy is coming to the right answers from limited information.

“Right on the money, huh? I don’t know how, but...you use the money you gain to buy items. Well?”

“Welcome.”

“Does that mean you need a lot of money to buy the items?”

“Too bad.”

I can buy the items for a tenth of what I sell them for, but I need points for other features and Blessings and to keep myself alive.

“No? Then you wouldn’t have a reason to get so much money from making things expensive... Are there other ways you can use money?”

“Welcome.”

I think it would be fastest to show her for real. I’ll use the most understandable method—a form change, into that candy mode.

“Whoa, what?! A light... Hey, wait, you completely changed.”

After changing into my candy-roll-vending mode, Hulemy presses herself against me to look. If I had a sense of touch, this would make me feel weird.

“This clear part looks like glass, but it’s not. How interesting. Is it set up so you put coins into here, and you can get the contents out? By showing the products themselves, it increases people’s

buying impulses... That's great!"

Her comment is accurate. She has a completely different eye from the other people in this world.

"Oops, sorry. I got so excited I became sidetracked. Anyway, Boxxo can use the money it saves to change its form like this... No, to change the very way it functions."

"Welcome."

She got the right answer, so I drop a roll of candy. You can eat that later.

"Oh, thanks. I'll take it."

Once she takes the candy, I go back to my usual vending machine form. I don't dislike my candy mode, but it makes me a little restless.

"As for what else I'd like to know... Right. Aside from changing your body and changing your items, is there anything else you can do?"

"Welcome."

I do have Force Field, after all. I think it's okay to tell a friend of Lammi's about it.

"Oh, so you still have a secret? Are you able to show it to me?"

"Welcome."

"Sounds like fun. Please show me."

I don't mind, but you're a little too close. If I use Force Field now, it'll blow her away. What should I do to get her to move back? Please move back, please move back! For now, I try willing her to.

"Hmm? You won't show me? Oh, sorry, is it dangerous? Let me back up a bit... How is this?"

"Welcome."

This wasn't my thoughts reaching her—Hulemy just took a good guess.

She's far enough away now, so I should be fine. There's a small desk nearby, but nothing is on it, so I guess there's no harm blowing it away.

Well then, I'll activate Force Field.

A blue light appears around me. Translucent blue walls materialize three feet away from me, boxing me in.

"Whoa, what is this? It looked like it pushed that table out, sending it flying. Is this like a barrier? Is it all right for me to touch this?"

"Welcome."

It's basically a super-hard wall, so touching it is no problem.

Without fear, she pokes the wall with a finger before pressing her palm to it to see what it feels like. She pours water into her cup, then flicks drops of it with her finger, watching with intent interest as it bounces off the Force Field.

"It feels like I'm touching a sturdy wall. And it seems to be pretty rock solid, too."

Watching her cling to the wall like this makes me feel a bit mischievous. Let's scare her a little.

I permit Hulemy's entrance into the Force Field.

"I have to test to see how much of an impact it can withst—
Huh? *Eek!*"

She was pushing against the Force Field with both hands, so her hands fly through the Force Field and touch me. Her excess of momentum causes her to run into me to stop herself.

If I were physically human, this would be lucky for me. But seeing a woman leap into a vending machine's breast... From an objective point of view, she'd just be a crazy person...

"Wh-what happened? My body entered the blue walls. You didn't undo it—you allowed me to come in. A strong wall, and you can choose who can go in and out. I've heard of this somewhere before... Oh, where was it, I think in the empire... Oh, right! Force Field—it's Force Field! I remember a rare ability like this being one of the Blessings!"

"Welcome."

Hulemy has a surprising amount of knowledge. I completely understand why Lammis wanted me to meet her.

"Boxxo, that's amazing. You can handle all shapes and sizes of products, and you can change your body and functionality. Plus, you can even use a Blessing. You're beyond the scope of a magic item."

I'm happy for the praise, but this isn't my ability or anything. I just happened to receive an excellent vending machine body. Your knowledge is what we should really be proud of, because it's something you achieved on your own.

I answer all sorts of questions, and we continue into the night until she's satisfied.

Overcome with intellectual curiosity, the happy Hulemy is holding a health drink. She was so excited she looked like she was

going to pass out, so I added an item to combat that.

It's a fairly pricey item, too, so it produces an immediate effect. As soon as she drank it, she got really energetic. The expensive ones are the real deal. Their nutritional value has helped me many times when I was sick.

Still, it looks like she's reaching her limit, and she decides to go to sleep. She lies on her back on a long table a short distance away and covers herself with a rag before falling asleep within moments. How bold.

Leaving herself in such a defenseless state is dangerous in a roughhouse criminal organization. I don't know if I find it exciting or what, but I'll have to take the watch tonight.

A Way to Fulfill Your Desires

As I watch her snore the night away in a deep sleep, I think about what the future has in store for me.

I don't think it would be a mistake to consider Hulemy an ally. It seems like they want her alive, at least until she uncovers my secrets, so I don't believe I need to worry about them killing her soon.

According to Lammis, she's a person filled with wanderlust. If she goes missing, nobody worries about her, and it's quite possible nobody even notices she's missing. I shouldn't expect anyone to come looking for her.

But they've probably realized I'm gone, so I can only pray Director Bear sends out a search party for me. I just hope Lammis isn't so worried that she does something reckless.

Lammis has obviously been contributing a lot to the settlement's reconstruction, but I think I have been, too. My disappearing is a loss for the settlement, one that will delay the reconstruction efforts... At least, that's how I hope they interpret it. That would certainly help my situation.

As I mull it over, I hear a soft *click* through the midnight room veiled in silence. When I look over to where I heard it, I see the doorknob turn and the door slowly open. I thought they'd come.

"Hey, we actually doing this?"

"You guys are pent up, too, aren't you? You can leave if you don't want to do it."

"W-well, I mean, no curves, spindly, and filthy. And not a damned bit of sexiness."

"Makes no difference to me."

"Didn't the boss tell us not to do anything to her?"

"She'll keep quiet if we show her a blade and threaten her."

They're whispering to one another, speaking of vulgar things.

Three of them. The low-life peon Gugoye isn't with them. He's probably being prudent after their boss threatened him so much today.

I could announce "Welcome" at maximum volume to cause a stir, but underground rooms usually have good soundproofing, so I'm frankly not sure it would make a difference. Especially since I get the feeling this is a repurposed jail cell.

And by surprising them, they might accidentally hurt Hulemy in the confusion. It's even possible they'll try to destroy me out of desperation to keep me quiet.

In that case, what do I do? They're inching closer to her, evaluating her, their eyes crawling up and down her body.

There's no time. I'll try this.

"H-hey, wait. The magic-item box is glowing."

Right before they touch her skin, one of them gets flustered, hits the other two on the back, and stares in my direction.

"W-wait, what? Is it changing its products...? No, it's changing shape."

"Th-this... This is incredible! Look at these detailed drawings of naked women. This one is tempting me with sexy underwear. That is one erotic body."

The three of them cling to me, staring at the magazines through the glass—the porno mags, as they're colloquially known.

You don't see vending machines carrying porno mags very much now that the Internet has gotten popular, but I'm aware they still survive quietly in certain places.

All right, here's the critical moment. I drop six specially chosen magazines into my compartment.

"Hey, they're falling out!"

"Really? Let me see."

"Me too, me too!"

Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha! They're hooked. The amount of effort Japan puts into eroticism is nothing to scoff at. Especially when vending machines sell them—you can't see what's inside, so the important part is how you grab customers by using only the front cover.

All the poses and angles are calculated down to the finest details. What will happen if people from another world, where sexual culture hasn't advanced as far, see them?

Also, the magazines I've given them are ones I chose from all those that I've bought—ones where I'm confident in the contents. A

lot of these tend to be awful on the inside. How many times have I been fooled?

Ah, well. I'm a vending machine maniac, so it's not like I have an interest in this stuff—I only bought them as part of my collection. I certainly was not sneaking out of the house at night and only buying them after making sure nobody was around.

We have the Internet now, so people can fulfill their sexual urges without laboring for it. I used it, too, so I might not have the right to say one thing or another about it, but there is one thing I'd like to set the record straight on anyway.

Porn you worked to obtain has a different value than porn you get from a single click! Even if the contents are cheap and completely different from the cover, no matter how many times they betray your expectations, you always remember them—they live on inside you!

...This is one of the countermeasures I thought of while consulting with Shirley before, who runs the sex business. Still, back then, I didn't end up in this mode. After all, it would kind of seem like I was spreading my own inclinations to the settlement.

"Whoa, how are these pictures so detailed? These are crazy. I'm overwhelmed."

"H-how are her boobs so big? Wait, you can *do* that?!"

"Seriously, seriously, seriously?!"

They're all so absorbed that even middle school kids just awakening to their own sexuality would be weirded out. They bury themselves in "reading" and forget all about Hulemy's existence.

It's gone according to my predictions thus far. What happens next is the problem.

"I...I'm not going to do it. I just remembered I have something to do."

"What...a coincidence. My stomach hurts, so I'm calling it quits."

"A-all right, then... I'll get going, too."

For some reason, all three hunch over and leave the room, each with a magazine in both hands. I considered the possibility they would excite the men into assaulting Hulemy, but it looks like their sexual curiosity got the best of them.

They must have decided it would be better to fulfill their desires with these instead of risking it and assaulting her. The seductive women they'd never seen before, their sexually

provocative clothing, the pictures of people entangled—were these alone that much of a shock?

The subjects in these magazines all have abnormally good-looking bodies, and their faces are beautiful, too. I mustn't give voice to opinions about photo-editing software being great lately, or my becoming disillusioned by it.

As long as they have some way to release, violence will fall by the wayside.

If things had taken a turn for the worse and they assaulted her, I was ready to do something about it with noise and my Force Field. But I'm glad things worked out.

The door closed, and they disappeared. Hulemy is still snoring away, oblivious to the fact that she was almost attacked. If this will put them on good behavior for a while, though, we won't have any conflicts we can't afford.

I can't escape on my own, and my options are severely limited. She obviously can't carry me out of here. Without Lammis, it's impossible for any one person to lift me.

I realize how important she is only now that she's gone— Well, that kind of sounds like we're lovers who just broke up, doesn't it?

In the end, buying time and getting in the way is about all I can do. I don't have anywhere near enough points for another Blessing. That means I have to rely on my features. Maybe I'll go through the list again.

A decent chunk of time passes while I'm comparing how many remaining points I have to what I should be getting, and Hulemy wakes up.

She gives a great big yawn. "Man, I slept like a rock. Mornin', Boxxo," she says, lifting a hand toward me as she casually scratches her disheveled hair. Her clothes are messy from her sleep, but it makes her look far more sloppy than sexy.

She leans back to stretch her joints, but even bent like that, there's nothing protruding from her chest area. This isn't the kind of thing where she's actually a guy, right? Because the way she talks is perfectly masculine.

"Anyway, what should I do today? I'd like to research your features, but..."

In the middle of her sentence, her stomach makes a loud noise. Hulemy scratches her cheek with a finger.

“Sorry. I’m always careful about them putting strange stuff in my food, so I’ve only been eating bits and pieces. I’m seriously hungry.”

I see. I’ll treat you to some food, then. She’s probably cold, since she’s been rubbing her arms and legs since she got up. I’d like to suggest cup ramen, but if she’s that hungry, then I’ll give her a can of oden first, since she can eat it right away.

I drop her a can. After she takes that, I offer cup ramen.

“This is real warm. Is this container completely airtight...? If I twist this and pull it... Whoa! This is incredible. It smells great.”

She greedily devours the oden in one go. After drinking up the broth, she goes for the cup ramen. At first she isn’t sure how to use the hot water, but once she manages to pour it in, she sits cross-legged on the table and whistles to herself as she waits for it to be done. She opens the lid several times to prod the noodles and check how they’re doing, then closes it and repeats the process, like a little kid. She easily puts away the entire cup, too, and she still looks hungry, so I decide to have her test a new product—bread in a can.

“The fluffy stuff in this tube... It’s bread! Boy, you could put cafeterias out of business with all this. And this bread is great, too. It’s so soft!”

Her table manners aren’t polite by any stretch, but watching her enjoy the food so much makes me happy.

With that, it seems she’s full. She lounges on the table as she scratches the bulge in her belly, using her fork as a toothpick.

Just then, the door clacks open, and the stern-faced man they were calling “boss” shows up.

“Looks like you’re awake. Figure out anything about that box?”

“Eh? And why should I have to follow your instructions, hmm?!”

Despite being the one kidnapped, Hulemy glares daggers at the large, frightening man. She must have a lot of nerve—and she’s not letting an inch of fear show. I wouldn’t be surprised if her heart is made out of steel.

“You’ve got guts, I’ll give you that. If you join our gang, we’d treat you a lot better, you know.”

“Unfortunately for you, I’m not about to obey villains, or leave myself in your care.”

“Hey, careful with the tough talk. You want to meet the same

fate as your friends?"

"Friends?" She spits. "They're not friends. They're just hired bodyguards."

She hired bodyguards? I guess that makes sense. Clearly, she isn't physically trained; a girl like her wouldn't go exploring a stratum on her own with all the monsters crawling about.

"But listen here. I may have hired them with money, but that doesn't mean I'll forgive you bastards for killing them!"

"Ha. What can a weak woman like you do on her own? I'm not a very patient man. How about this? Either fix that box or get the gold coins out within the next two days. Understand?"

The boss leaves it at that and exits the room.

Hulemy drags a thumb across her neck and sticks out her tongue.

We have two days. We have to come up with a plan before then, because if we don't have anything, they'll either kill her or put her through a hell worse than death. I have to do something.

A Place to Belong

Unable to come up with any particular breakthroughs, we've come to the second night since I arrived here. Those guys seem to think I'm broken; none of them have ever tried to buy something from me.

The three people I gave porno mags to showed up just one time after that. They appeared to be paying attention to me, glancing my way every now and again, but it didn't look like any of them told the others about how I changed shape or that they got magazines for free. If they did, the fact that they tried to assault Hulemy would reach their boss's ears, and they don't want that.

Or maybe they were afraid of the magazines being confiscated.

Hulemy continues talking with me, doing her analysis at her own pace—not to tell their ringleader about me but purely out of academic interest.

They do bring her food in the morning and evening, but she's been tossing it all into a barrel in the corner of the room and closing the lid. Foodwise, she's getting by entirely on what I'm providing her, so she doesn't need to eat that gross-looking stuff.

As a side note, her dinner tonight was two different varieties of cup ramen and some pressed potato chips. I considered stocking a new product, but points are too valuable in this dire situation. I decided I should save up as much of them as possible to prepare for the worst.

Hulemy exhales noisily. "Thanks again for the food. Man, your cooking is crazy. I can't even come close to this stuff. I'm always too busy doing research."

I'm not the amazing one—it's how good the manufacturers are.

Her skin looks a lot better now, probably after two days of gorging herself on food. I think her cheeks might have even filled out a bit. She's still skinny, but it makes her look more attractive

than before.

Her once-disheveled hair is now silky smooth, back to its ideal state. This is the result of me giving her bottled water, which I warm up, since it normally comes out of me cold, in addition to the shampoo and hair treatment you might see in a vending machine in a hotel or deluxe public bath. I gave her a towel, too, of course.

“Phew. That was refreshing.”

Without caring one bit about the vending machine in the room, Hulemy, having exposed her upper body, washes her face, wipes herself down, and downs a bottle of coffee milk with a look of satisfaction.

Coffee milk is what you drink after a bath. I’m not budging on that. I look at her body again, without the blackened clothing, and while her upper body is rather unfortunate, her lower body is overflowing with feminine charm. She has child-rearing hips... Not that the observation denotes any lewd thoughts.

At this point, a normal man would probably be turned on, but after becoming a vending machine, I think such feelings have weakened for me. I’d have no way to release them anyway, so it works out.

Hulemy is making a good show of being relaxed, but our time runs out tomorrow morning. If we’re going to escape, tonight will most likely be our last chance. I’ll draw their attention while she escapes. That’s the best plan, I think, but I have no way to tell her.

This stupid automatic-communication disorder. Now that it’s come to this, I think we could force a siege, too... If she can somehow carry me over to the door, it should make it fairly hard to open. I can give her food, so we can hold out for about a week.

If that’s what we’re going to do, though, her carrying me to the door is the impossible obstacle.

“Well, I guess what will be, will be. Boxxo, don’t worry too much about it! I’ll explain how valuable you are. If I can convince them that I can repair you if I have more time, I’m sure they’ll believe me. They’re idiots, after all!”

Now that she’s refreshed and finished wiping herself down, she takes off the clothes she’s been wearing and puts on a pair of underwear and a men’s-size T-shirt that I gave her.

Ah, the underwear plus a baggy T-shirt. I always wanted to be in this situation just once back in Japan—to think that I’d experience it in another world, of all places. Reincarnating was

worth it.

The underwear and T-shirt are both, of course, things I've bought at vending machines. Oh, and I'd like to emphasize that the women's underwear was something I bought as a mistake. A mistake, understand?

"This is going to be too cold, so I'll put this on."

Now that she's refreshed, she's going to put on those worn, blackened clothes? I have experience purchasing underwear and shirts at vending machines, but unfortunately, I've never seen pajamas. I think they're probably out there if you search for them—it goes to show how inexperienced I was as an enthusiast.

I've never seen blanket or futon vending machines, and even if I had, they would have been too big for an impulse buy. Instead, I'll give her a bunch of bath towels. You can frequently see this item at deluxe public baths and hotels.

"I'm ashamed to use something so clean and white."

Please go ahead and use it. You'll catch a cold like that. We don't know what will happen in the future. We can't give up—we need to prepare for any situation.

"Boxxo, mind if I get serious for a second?"

"Welcome."

She comes up to me, then lays a bath towel on the ground and takes a seat on it cross-legged. In that position, her panties are fully exposed, but it doesn't matter. I suppose it would be stranger if she was embarrassed about it in front of a vending machine.

"If you're thinking about letting me escape by sacrificing yourself, let me stop you right there. Even if I get outside, the region is crawling with monsters. You think I can survive out there when I have no combat abilities?"

She knew what I was thinking? I can only display my intent by answering yes-or-no questions, but I've talked to her quite a bit in these two days. She's naturally smart, so I suppose my simple brain circuits are easy for her to read.

"Too bad."

"Right? So it doesn't do me any good to escape. We have to somehow stall for time and wait for a golden opportunity. I must seem like a pretty foolish woman to you, eh, Boxxo? I'm not very strong at all, but I act like a huge, reckless idiot. I'm not really scared of dying. Actually, I guess it's more like those emotions are numb for me now... Ah, what am I saying? Anyway, I'm going to

sleep! Good night!”

“Please come again.”

She lies down on the spot, covers herself with bath towels, and falls asleep within moments. Her ability to doze off in record time can only be called a special skill.

She was getting to some serious stuff. Something must have happened that she can't tell other people. I don't have any way to pry into her affairs, nor do I want to dig up her hidden past anyway.

Which brings us to midnight. Even the regulars here probably aren't awake, save for the lookouts outside the door and the abandoned fortress. Now is the time to act, but what do you want a vending machine to do? I literally don't have a leg to stand on.

The only thing I can do is protect her with my Force Field from those idiots, since they might come to attack her again thinking they'll dispose of her anyway.

I can't settle down, so I keep looking around the room, but the only things in here are a timeworn desk, a chair, some documents, the light of a magic item, and what looks like a set of tools. The ceiling is about ten feet high, and it, the walls, and the floor are made of stone that looks thick and sturdy.

The classic escape would be to dig through the wall, but how many years would that take? In the end, no matter how much I look around, there's no way out. I've just about given up, prepared to wait for tomorrow.

Just then, there's a soft sound, and my vending machine body shakes a little. What was that? It was almost nothing, but did I just hear something bursting open?

I listen hard with my nonexistent ears and hear another sound in the distance, like something exploding, followed by a clash of arms.

“Hey, what was that?!”

“It's coming from above!”

I hear the guards shouting, and their footsteps disappear up the stairs. Does this mean the fortress is under attack?!

Then I have to wake up Hulemy.

“Get one free with a winner. Get one free with a winner. Get one free with a winner.”

“Huh? Wait, what? I, uh... What's wrong, Boxxo?”

She looks at me with a half-asleep expression as she wipes some drool away. I have no way to explain, so for now—have this can of coffee to wake up.

“Oh, thanks.” She drinks some, and she burps. “Best thing for waking up in the morning.”

Her demeanor still reeks of “old dude,” but that doesn’t matter right now. The only thing I can think of in this situation is that a raid is happening. I have to find out who the lowlifes are fighting.

A couple guesses at the assailant’s identity come to mind. First, the monsters that roam the stratum. Second—hunters.

The settlement’s increase in activity naturally means an influx of villains like these who can smell the money. Let’s assume stealing me isn’t their first crime, and that they’ve committed many already. They could be on a watch list.

Still, this is too fortunate to be a coincidence, which means...

Wait, were they waiting for someone to steal me? A hunk of iron full of money is the perfect bait, isn’t it? They’re leaving a giant, defenseless safe in the middle of the road. It’s like they were asking criminals to go after me.

Plus, stealing me would be a pretty large-scale operation. I’m significantly valuable, too, which means it would take time and effort to move me. I must be the best bait around.

Hold on. Has Director Bear or someone in the association used me for a plan they thought up? But Director Bear would have told me beforehand. No, maybe they stole me as he was coming to tell me, and he used the opportunity? Whichever the case, if my prediction is correct, we’re saved!

“This noise... Are people fighting?”

Hulemy seems to have finally woken up. With her usual sharp gaze, she moves to the door and puts her ear to it.

“Yeah, they’re fighting someone, all right. Don’t know who, but this might be our chance.”

I was thinking the same thing. The worst scenario would be each side wiping the other out. If that happens, we’ll be trapped here.

She struggles to get the door open for a short while, but it’s locked from the outside, and it doesn’t look like there’s anything she can do.

“—xxoooo!”

Wait, that voice. I give a start—I know that voice. Hulemy must

have an idea, too. She knits her eyebrows and clings to the door.

“Boxxxxxxxxxx! Wheeeeeere aaaaaaaare youuuuuuu?!”

I know this voice coming from the other side of the thick door all too well. It’s—

“Lammis?!”

Yes, it’s Lammis’s voice! I’d never mistake it. That means the hunters are the ones attacking. We’re saved!

“But wait, why is she here? Does this mean the Hunters Association is behind this? And she’s calling the name Boxxo. Do you know her?”

“Welcome.”

“Ohhh, great! Let’s make sure we don’t get in their way or hold them back. Wouldn’t be very funny if they took me hostage in desperation, after all.”

She seems to decide it’s safest next to me. She gets her clothes together and leans back against me.

“Hope you’ll protect me if you need to!”

“Welcome.”

Leave it to me. Protecting, at least, is something I’m confident I can do.

I begin to hear the sounds of fighting and angry shouts getting closer. The tremors I feel from time to time are most likely Lammis. If she removed her fetters and wielded her Might with all her strength, she could tear through these decayed fortress walls like tissue paper.

“This could be bad,” says Hulemy suddenly, looking at the ceiling. I look as well, but I don’t see anything wrong. A little bit of dust is falling, but I don’t think it’s enough to signal a collapse.

“The storeroom is above us. It’s got all the coins those garbage heaps amassed in it. That’s all well and good, but those morons had to start hoarding defective magicite—also known as blastite. Originally, magicite was used as a fuel source for magic items, but sometimes the mana built into it starts flowing strangely, and then you can’t use it for fuel—mishandling it could cause magic items to malfunction and break.”

Magicite exists, too? I’ve been wondering how magic items worked. I see—so that’s the trick.

“Anyway, defective magicite is hard to handle. I even heard a story once about a nation that stored a lot of it away, planning to use it for weaponry, but then the whole thing exploded, taking

nearby facilities with it. Nowadays, it's common sense to destroy it as soon as you find it...but they don't know that. Some merchant probably sold them a bunch of huge pieces of blastite and told them it was magicite, and then they threw it all into the storeroom above us with the utmost care, as you can imagine. Morons, am I right?"

If this didn't relate to us, I could say "what morons," but this means there's an unexploded bomb sitting right above us... Are they freaking morons?!

"Anyway, you get it now? If you give blastite a strong impact, things will turn real bad. If the roof of the storeroom above us collapses and it hits the blastite..."

Yeah. Right. Say no more. Lammis, could you please tone it down just a little bit?!

I think I feel the bangs and shaking getting closer!

"Uh, yeah, this is really bad."

The moment the words leave Hulemy's mouth, the ceiling comes crashing down with a thunderous boom.

As a Vending Machine Maniac

The sound of an explosion, so loud that it would have stunned my eardrums if I had them, fills the underground chamber. As we look up at the ceiling, it creaks, and we see crevices start to scatter out in all directions.

Ack, this is exactly what Hulemy was worried about!

“I-it’s caving in! Ahhhhhhhhh!”

She’s cute when she screams—this isn’t the time to think about that! Force Field, activate!

At the last moment, blue walls surround me. It repels the collapsing ceiling, preventing it from entering the field. With an unidentifiable noise surrounding us, Hulemy clutches her ears and crouches, cowering.

When the sound finally subsides, we’re trapped in the rubble. It would normally be pitch-black with no light coming through, but with the light coming out of my vending machine body, we have a good view of our surroundings.

“Th-thanks for saving me, Boxxo. You’re a pretty reliable guy, y’know that?”

She bumps my metal body with a fist. The situation calls for more urgency, but for the moment, we’re okay. The problem is what to do now.

We can manage for food. The biggest issue is keeping this Force Field up. With a little over ten thousand points and that number decreasing by one per second, there’s a limit to how long I can maintain it. If it costs 3,600 points per hour, someone will have to dig us out within three hours or we’ll just get crushed to death.

If it was just me...I could withstand it by increasing my toughness. But that couldn’t be further from what I want to do. If I abandon this woman, it’ll haunt me for the rest of my life. Now that I’m not human anymore, I want my soul, at least, to be as human as

possible.

And I don't want to see Lammis cry, either.

"Boxxo, can you keep this Force Field up forever?"

"Too bad."

No point lying to her now. I'll tell her the situation in as much detail as I can, and then we should search for a way we'll both be saved.

"Do we have less than an hour?"

"Too bad."

"Is it a two-hour limit?"

"Too bad."

"Around three hours?"

"Welcome."

"I see. We might last three hours... That's not much of a margin. What a pain."

Yes, we don't have time. We have to break out of this situation before it's up. Unfortunately, no tool I can have as a vending machine product will let us get out of here.

It's cruel, but I guess this is reality. I'm incredibly far from gaining another Blessing. Things would change if I could have an optional drill part as a feature, but obviously that doesn't exist. Even if it did, it would probably take an immense number of points.

We're in a bind, no matter how I look at it, but...not yet. I must be able to combine something to...

"Hey, Boxxo. Do you need money to maintain this Blessing? You said you had more ways to use money before."

"Welcome."

Ah yes, I did say that. Of course, if we got a lot of coins, I could change them into points and preserve the Force Field. But Hulemy said they took all her money and belongings. We don't have the kind of money I need here.

"I thought so. Then we might be able to pull through. Boxxo, look up."

Pull through how? I don't believe her right off the bat, but I move my gaze toward the upper portion of the ceiling rubble. What does she want from—? Wait.

"Do you see it? That bag is full of coins. Remember how I said there's a storeroom above us?"

Oh, I get it. I see. We're right under a storeroom, which is what caused this huge mess. If the floor fell out, then obviously whatever

was inside the storeroom would fall.

In that case, I'll allow just that bag into the Force Field!

The bag falls to the floor. Its opening is large enough to fit an entire child inside, and it's filled with gold, silver, and copper coins. This is great! With all this, I can keep the Force Field up for a long time. Just the coins that fell out of the bag upon its descent should let me maintain it for a whole day.

All I need to do now is set my item prices to cost at least one gold coin.

"Sweet. I'm buying whatever I want now!"

Gold, silver, and copper coins pour into me, and my points rise to unbelievable levels. I think this money is probably acquired illegally, but there's no way to return it to the people who lost it, so I'll put it to good use.

If their boss is safe out there somewhere and he realizes all the money they saved up is gone, he might slip a disk.

The Force Field is no longer a worry. If we can hold out for three days, Lammi will be able to clear the rubble and dig us out. And I have faith that if I keep calling out to her, she'll find us before long.

With the threat to our lives at bay, we finally have time to think. Now we just have to wait for rescue.



Hulemy is in total relaxation mode; she's been munching on her chips, bought for the premium price of more than one gold coin. She's quiet now, though, so maybe she's sleepy since she's full.

"Hah, hah, hah-hah, what...? I can't breathe..."

Wait, her face doesn't look good. She's not breathing smoothly. She has a hand to her forehead as though she's in pain. What's wrong? She was so energetic before, and yet... Oh, shoot, I'm an idiot!

I have a mechanical body, and I made a stupid mistake because of it. Right now, she's suffocating. Unlike me, people need to breathe. The rubble has us totally buried, in an airtight space. People can't last long like that.

Crap. A little bit of thought and I would have realized it. I slipped up, figuring I won't die, and exposed her to danger without needing to.

“My head hurts...Hah, hah, hah...”

What should I do? I have even less time to think than before. If Hulemy suffocates and passes out, I'll be powerless. If she needs oxygen... Oxygen... I got it!

I recall seeing that I had a feature for this. I thought I'd never get it, but I've never been so happy to have been a vending machine maniac before this moment.

The vending machine changes into a more retro shape. After switching forms into an archaic rectangular design, Japanese characters appear on my upper body:

OXYGEN VENDING MACHINE

In the middle of my body are masks that can cover your entire nose and mouth, as well as a thin tube outside me, connecting to my main body. When you hook it up, you can breathe oxygen from it.

“Hah, hah, wh-what do I do with this?”

Originally, the oxygen provision system cost fifty yen per three thousand cubic centimeters of oxygen, but this time, of course, it's free. I make sure to output the oxygen so that even if she doesn't figure it out, she'll be fine. The important thing is to provide oxygen to this space.

“Hah, hah, there's something, hah-hah-hah...coming out... You want me...hah-hah...to breathe it?”

“Welcome.”

She puts the mask firmly over her mouth. She begins to greedily inhale the oxygen, her pained look gradually relaxing. Great—I think she's okay now.

Phew. That scared me. It was worth being a part of the vending machine enthusiast community—whenever I find a vending machine museum, I jump in without a second thought.

This oxygen vending machine was something that actually existed around 1965. At the time, air pollution was a problem in Japan, and apparently, they placed some of these in Ginza as an attempted countermeasure.

Based purely on what I've seen, it's one of the strangest vending machines I've ever come across.

I have more than enough points to keep both the Force Field and the oxygen going without issue. Now we just have to wait for Lammis to rescue us. Only after giving some thought as to whether I'm forgetting something again, of course.

I can provide food whenever she needs it, and all the items she bought litter the floor now, so we'll be fine for a while. I've got points to spare, as well. I'll be on alert for a while, without rest or sleep, to prepare for anything unexpected. I should be good. I don't think I've overlooked anything.

It saddens me that I can't say that for sure, since it's been pretty bad until now, but if I fail, we should manage as long as I back her up. I swear to myself that I won't make a mistake until we're rescued.

"Thanks, Boxxo. You know, if you were human, that might have been really bad."

Sitting, she looks up at me with a blush, almost making my heart—er, my circuitry—start to pound. But Lammis is the one who has my back, metaphorically and physically.

I wonder if she's crying right now, worried that I might've been crushed. She knows about my Force Field and my toughness, so I think she'll be fine. I just hope she's not acting crazy.

As if to interrupt my thoughts, a strange sound comes from overhead. A scraping noise mixed with a low-pitched sound, reverberating through my body. Did something heavy fall to the ground?

The noise is quickly canceled out—by a certain girl's shouting.

"Boxxo! Where are you?! Even if you're not safe, answer me!"

That wailing... Is she crying? I swear, crying over a vending machine... Even a maniac like me would go pale.

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha. Lammis is calling, Boxxo. Give her an answer," says Hulemy, standing up and hitting me on the back.

The rubble overhead blows away, and Lammis, lit by the magical lamps, peers in at us. Her face is smeared with snot and tears, and the area around her eyes is swollen from bawling; her eyes themselves are bloodshot. I can tell at a glance how much she was worried about me.

"Boxxoooooooo!"

Without hesitating, she leaps at me from above. I allow her through the Force Field, and she slips through its blue walls and crashes into me.

[25 damage. Durability decreased by 25.]

Ow, arggh. That was more damage than I thought. Still, I wish this damage indicator would read the mood.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry. This all happened because I took my eyes

off you.”

You don’t need to worry about that so much. And I’m happy for the hug, but I hear some unpleasant groans from my body.

[10 damage. Durability decreased by 10.]

...I’m going to recover my durability. If this goes on, I could lose the life she just saved. Please calm down, Lammis.

“Thank you.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry—I’m just so happy you’re okay!”

I have no arms to hold her as she sobs, and I don’t have a mouth to give her words of comfort—but from the bottom of my heart, I’m glad I met you. And I’m happy I could meet you again, Lammis.



Boxxo, eh...? A strange magic item but full of too many mysteries.

A magic item with its own mind. It seems like a human soul is in there, but what is this box, anyway? It’s a container made of materials I’ve never seen or heard of before, and the things inside taste like nothing I’ve ever experienced—and they’re even tasty.

I was pretty confident in my intelligence, but there was nothing like this recorded in anything I could find. If someone could make a magic item with the same capabilities as Boxxo’s, they’d be swimming in money for sure.



And the human soul trapped inside it—it's a pain that it can only say yes or no, but I can still feel the human goodness in it.

Lammis has always been a good judge of people, and if she's that attached to him, then he probably isn't a bad person.

She's still hugging him, making creaking noises, but the box is taking it all without so much as a complaint. This mysterious magic item—it protected me from the falling rubble, and did its damndest to save me.

Seriously, what in the world is Boxxo? I'm pretty sure it can convert money into power, but...to have a Blessing to top it all off. Plus, it's the absolute wall Force Field, which I've only ever heard about in legends.

It's a heap of mysteries piled atop mysteries, with some more mysteries thrown into the mix.

It's such an incredible research specimen that my magic-item engineer's soul can't suppress its giddiness.

With Boxxo, I wouldn't need to worry about food or drink; I could always get delicious stuff right away. And I wouldn't have to worry about being hurt, since there would be Force Field for when things go sour.

It's pretty hefty, so normally it would be hard to even carry, but with Lammis's Might, everything is solved. The day might come in the future where this pair gets far more famous.

I think I'm right in assuming that the hunters find him pretty necessary. It's probably only a matter of time before the major hunter teams come knocking. That Force Field's impenetrable defense and not having to worry about food must be really hard to overlook.

The world around Lammis looks like it's about to change completely from now on. I suppose I'll help her out as her childhood friend. I have a debt to Boxxo, after all.

I have to uncover the secret of his abilities and save the soul trapped in that magic item of a box.

"Lammis, give him some room. His body is crying out in pain."

"If I let go, he might go away somewhere again, Hulemy... Wait, what are you doing here?"

She didn't notice me until now? You're such a single-minded, dazzling person.

But her honesty is cause for concern. I'll stick with her for a while again. And because I'm curious about Boxxo, who she's so attached to.

"Well, I guess I'm looking forward to seeing more from you, Boxxo," I say, giving his metal body a poke. He drops a sweet drink into his compartment.

I wasn't exactly trying to demand more, you know...

Epilogue

"It's not often that you agree to help if you're not getting anything out of it, Captain," says the very short lady standing next to Stubble, who's wearing his wide-brimmed hat. She peers into the hole in the floor.

"Would you quit it? I'm the kind of guy who's always nice to others, and good to himself, too."

He flicks the brim of his hat and sets one foot atop the rubble, probably trying to strike a pose, but it's met with a cold reaction from his teammates. Two young men, their only distinction being their red and white heads of hair, heave a loud sigh.

"Captain knows how valuable Boxxo is. You haven't forgotten our goal, have you?" begins a woman impassively, explaining to her teammates as she runs a hand through her beautiful, wavy blue hair. "If we want to slay the stratum lords here and in other strata... Those will be long expeditions, and Boxxo is indispensable. If we make a name for ourselves with him, it should be easier to lure him into the Menagerie. At least, that's the captain's dirty— I mean, *well-thought-out* plan."

"Vice Captain Filmina, did you just make fun of me?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Captain Kerioyl. I am ever your obedient subordinate...probably."

She muttered the last word under her breath, but the captain seems to have heard. Veins pop out at his temples.

"But it's true—if we can use that magic item, long expeditions will be easy!"

"Right? You get me. We have a goal. We need to use anything, any means to accomplish it. We can't make our dream—the Menagerie of Fools' dream—come true without Boxxo."

Suddenly, the expressiveness on the teammates' faces thins out and vanishes. Their banter is gone without a trace; standing there

now are beast-like predators, eyes sharp, targeting their prey.

The girl embraces the magic-item box down in the collapsed hole, and they watch it carefully.

Afterword

I wonder what kind of person is reading this afterword right now. Even if you've already read the main story on Let's Become Novelists, rest assured there's extra content in here. If you've read the entire book without knowing what it was about...how did you like it? If you thought it was funny and interesting, then I'm fully satisfied.

To those of you who read the afterword first, without knowing what the book is about—my friend is one of those types—I'll reveal one shocking fact that will make you want to read the story: The protagonist is a vending machine... Oh, you knew that from the title? My apologies. That definitely wasn't a sufficient explanation, so allow me to touch on the story a bit.

To piggyback on that explanation, the protagonist is a man who died by being crushed under the weight of his vending machine obsession. But as fate would have it, he reincarnates as a vending machine. By the way, when I first talked about this concept with my friend, he was very nice. He said to me, "Writing more of your weird stories, I see..."

So the protagonist, now a vending machine, is sitting around on the lakeside in another world by himself, when the main heroine, Lammi, appears. Machine meets girl, and the story begins.

And well, that's my concise summary. Did you like it?

Being a vending machine, the protagonist can't move on his own, and he can't have an actual conversation with anyone. Maybe he's not a good main character. But I think the reason so many Let's Become Novelists users received the story well was because he doesn't give up; instead, he perseveres through desperate situations and manages to get through them.

I think—selfishly, perhaps—that this is a good book to

recommend to people who are **bored of protagonists who are really good-looking but claim they're not popular with ladies**. I personally think the protagonist looks really cool, but I doubt many people will agree there.

To change the topic completely, the way I first became an author was unique.

Until a few years ago, I helped out with my father's independent business, living a fulfilling life, which, though we didn't have much money, was always busy. But one day, my father died from a high fall, and I ended up inheriting the business.

In addition to the sudden managerial work hounding me every day, the sight of my father falling to the ground before my eyes, of a person dying in front of me, gave me acrophobia, and my work itself began to grow ever more painful. Our finances weren't in a good state to begin with. But to add to that, the world had shown me how harsh it was, its ability to flip upside down on a whim, and it soon showed me how disgraceful people can act when money is involved. I remember my body and mind both weakening during that time.

Without any way to continue doing my job in such a state, I closed down the business before even half a year had passed. It took a year before all the remaining work and cleanup was finished—and when it was, I was left with a gaping hole in my heart. I was spending my life as an empty husk, when suddenly one day, I had a thought: I don't know when I'm going to die like my father did. One question went through my mind: Have I done everything I've wanted to in life? Even with how much of a mess I was, I kept on searching for an answer to it.

While I was hanging out listlessly at home one day, for some reason I remembered all of a sudden that I've always liked reading books—so I began writing a novel.

It may have just been a form of escapism, thinking back on it. But I was creating stories while I was writing, and I started having fun putting letters to paper. Before I knew it, I was absorbed in creative activities.

I felt the desire swelling inside me to get people to read what I would write, and as I was thinking of ways to go about it, I hit upon a website called Let's Become Novelists, a site for submitting novels.

A series of hardships followed. I submitted a novel where the

protagonist was a hero who was warped to another world, and I had a grand idea in my mind that it was a satisfactory piece of work. However, only a handful of people even ended up liking it.

I swung around to the opposite side of the spectrum after that, submitting an eccentric battle-themed novel containing some erotic elements set in the near future. That one, however, ended up even less liked than my first work.

At that point, I was on the verge of breaking down. But I decided I would give up only after I'd gone far enough to satisfy myself. I then gathered information on what kind of work would be well received before finally writing a new novel.

When I did, it was rated so much better that you couldn't even compare it to the previous ones. It even climbed to the top of the daily rankings at one point. That novel seemed within reach of publishing—it just needed a little more. Unfortunately, several things got in the way, and it ended up being rejected. Nevertheless, the process of getting so far gave me confidence, so I pressed on, writing many different kinds of works. Serious stories where I pursued my own style, stories that were cheerful and fantastic. All of them saw a certain amount of appreciation, but none of them reached publication. Before I realized it, four years had passed since I'd started submitting novels.

That was when I set a goal for myself: If nobody came looking for publication before my birthday that year, I would give up writing novels. I'd caused trouble for those close to me at that point, so if that happened, I would pursue steadier options.

As my final work, I began writing a novel that didn't require much in the way of thought, one that was fantastic and original, and one that I wanted to write. This is the work that became *Reborn as a Vending Machine, I Now Wander the Dungeon*. This wasn't a novel where I adjusted for the readers' needs, or had to think long and hard about constructing a plot. Instead, I pursued my own style for it, and it garnered the most popularity of all my work. That was how I learned how interesting this world can be, despite it not always going your way. Life really is unpredictable.

To wrap this up, I'd like to thank the many people involved with this novel.

Ituwa Kato, who provided the illustrations—I was shocked that characters I thought up could be so charming. Over and over, I

found myself looking at them with a dumb grin on my face.

My editor, M., who acknowledged this work, and everyone in the Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko editing department—thanks to you, my dream of publication has come true.

S., who offered me advice and ideas; my mother, who I tried to keep this a secret from but told anyway; and the cute cats in my house—I'm grateful for you all.

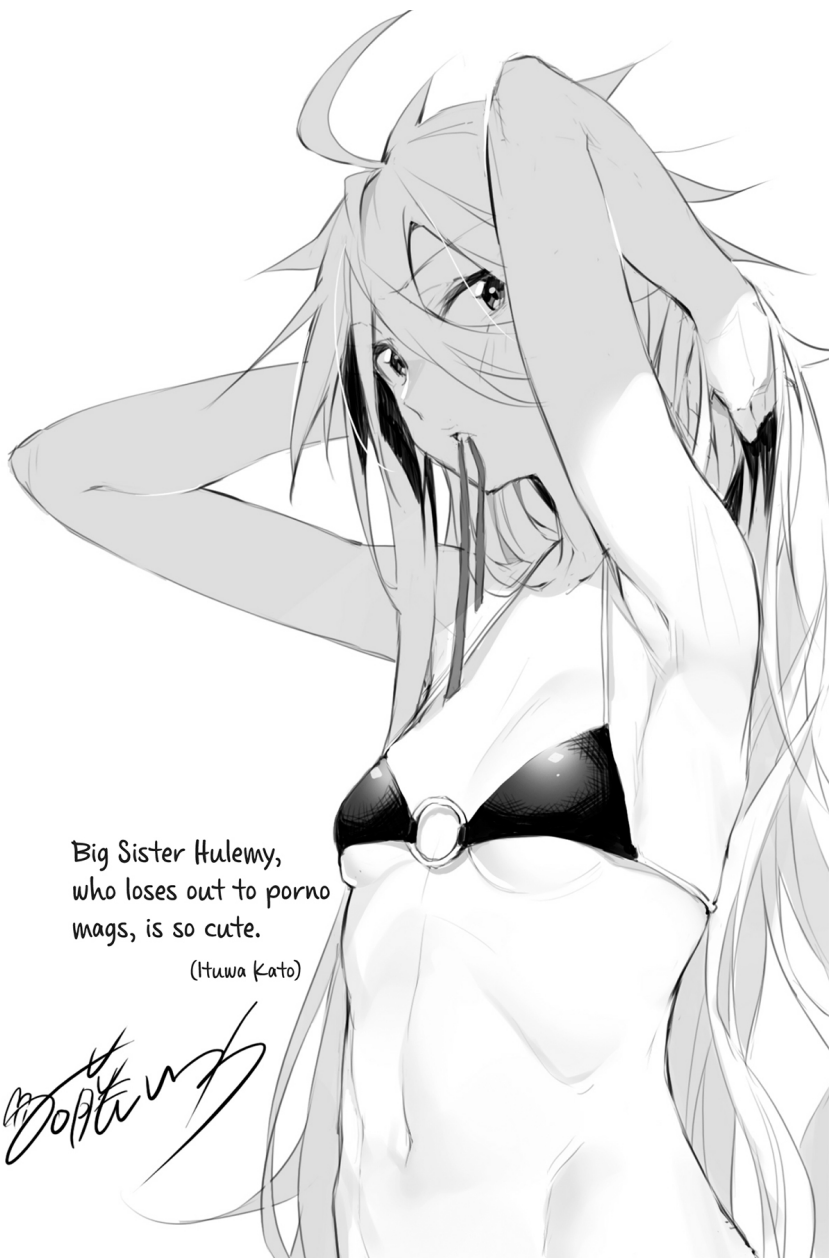
Everyone else involved with this book—thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The last people I want to thank are my readers who came to like this story through Let's Become Novelists. Let's be friends in the future.

And to everyone who bought this book—thank you!

Dad, I know this doesn't make up for letting your business fail, but this book is for you.

Hirukuma



Big Sister Hulemy,
who loses out to porno
mags, is so cute.

(Huwa Kato)

by DOPPEL

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